

POPULAR FICTION  
AND  
PUBLISHING  
1960s - 1990s

by

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## ABSTRACT

The popular fiction publishing trade is thriving at the end of the twentieth century and so is its ability to create bestsellers, but the average author remains poor. In seven chapters this thesis will outline the processes and agencies that have driven the trade forward and established the conditions for the creation of bestsellers. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the changes in the book trade between 1960 and 2000. Chapter 2 looks at the rise of literary agents, the huge increase in their numbers, and how they have transformed the modern publishing world. Chapter 3 is a survey of the literary prize and awards scene. The following four chapters look in detail at four very different bestsellers: the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D H Lawrence (1960), *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough (1977), *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie (1988), and *The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans (1995), to assess how they have contributed to the revisions in the publishing trade. In the conclusion I evaluate these changes in the trade and conclude that while the industry's flair for creating bestsellers will continue, very few authors will benefit.

**For Gabby Perez**



## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When, in 1994, I began formulating a popular fiction research proposal I asked a young female assistant in Blackwell's Oxford bookshop if she had any books on popular modern fiction. She indicated a stack of copies of a new book on the English novel edited by Malcolm Bradbury and I said: 'No, not that one - something about the sort of fiction people actually read.' 'Oh', she said, 'you mean trash', thus dismissing, in one perjorative word, my reading matter of the last forty-odd years, along with 90 per cent of the country's.

But her summarily dismissive answer to my rather inarticulate question, although not unexpected from an academically orientated bookshop, made me think about what I really meant by the phrase 'popular fiction'. Having read Joseph McAleer's *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*, published in 1992, my original intention had been, with his permission, to follow up his work, hence my title dates. To do this I intended to look at the bestseller lists as an indication of what people were reading over my forty year time scale. However this soon became impractical and after looking at what was already published in the popular fiction field the present format gradually evolved.

The length of my bibliography appears to indicate that there is a wealth of academic writing on the subject of popular fiction but on investigation it soon becomes apparent that many of the text books specialise in one or other genre and some, though carefully scrutinised have nothing relevant to say about my interpretation of the subject. For example, all I salvaged from Thomas J Roberts *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction* was a quote he uses from Betty Rosenberg's 1982 *Genrelecting: A Guide to Reading Interests in Genre Fiction*: 'This book is the fruit of a blissfully squandered reading life'. This I felt was an apt quote to relate to this thesis, especially in relation to the 'trash' comment. Other texts have been much more helpful and I have used them extensively but the main source of the information used has come from newspapers and specialist journals because the speed with which the popular

fiction and publishing world is changing means that often by the time items of interest have been printed they are already out of date. This is particularly relevant in the 1990s when, for example, a claim is made for the biggest publisher's advance or the highest sales total one day is eclipsed by something bigger or better the next. Thus, many of the figures or examples I have used will prove to be invalid by the time this text is published.

My initial interest in popular fiction research had been provoked by a young man saying that he had never read a book since he had been forced to do so at school. I found this proudly announced assertion difficult to believe but it had led me to look at the correlation between television serials and book sales to see whether a well publicized male-orientated television serial would encourage people, such as the previously mentioned young man, to read the related book. The television programme/book I chose was Lynda La Plante's *Civvies*; a story about ex-Falkland War soldiers published in 1992. She was, and still is, a popular fiction author who had had one of her books (*Bella Mafia*, 1991) listed in Alex Hamilton's *Guardian* Fastsellers list, so I assumed that this particular book would do as well. It did not. The sales figures were abysmal, in spite of respectable viewing figures for a BBC serial vying for viewers against strong competition from the other channels.

As so many bestselling authors are having their books filmed or televised I originally decided to expand on my earlier research and set off on 'an autograph hunt' to interview as many of these authors who would tolerate the intrusion. To them (David Lodge, Colin Dexter and Felix Francis, on behalf of his father Dick, in particular) I owe a debt of gratitude because they were very free with their time, although it is not directly reflected in the finished thesis because the course of my research changed. It was pointed out to me, initially by David Lodge and later by the W H Smith Archivist Tim Baker-Jones, that if I were going to work with bestseller lists I needed lists that covered the entire forty years but the bestseller lists published in the broadsheet newspapers and specialist book journals such as *The Bookseller* only began to appear in 1974, or I should change my title dates. Not to be put

off I approached W H Smith to see if they had any pre-1974 lists but following the Company's move from London to Swindon in 1985 there was a massive clearout of old records and data. Currently all their sales data is stored electronically on a rolling twenty-four month basis and then deleted.

Other well known literary names gave me advice and encouragement but any cynicism found in this text can be attributed to one person in particular, Martin Seymour-Smith, who was kind enough to warn me not to take the term 'bestseller' too literally because, he said, they were 'often faked by various means'. He handwrote a few lines at the bottom of his letter which he said I could quote: 'For many readers, the information "he/she is popular" sends them to libraries or shops. One writer of no merit whatsoever created a market for himself by sending in paid assistants to shops and libraries!'(17 February 1995) Sadly it is too late to ask him to whom he referred.

Others that I would particularly like to thank are: Professor Tony Davies of Birmingham University for his advice and kindness and particularly his perserverance in seeing me through this thesis; my sister, Adelaide Tunstill, and the rest of my family for their dedication in collecting newspaper and magazine articles related to this thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

When I started research for this thesis in 1995 Penguin Books were celebrating their sixtieth birthday and in a supplement that they produced in conjunction with *The Times* Daniel Johnson wrote: 'Literary novelists are...beginning to break out of their ghetto to reach a scale of audience normally reserved for "commercial" writers'.<sup>1</sup> He listed Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Roddy Doyle, Martin Amis, William Boyd, Jim Crace, Beryl Bainbridge, and Hilary Mantel as examples. This improbable statement from the literary editor of a broadsheet intrigued me because literary novels have featured on the bestseller Top 10 lists nearly every year since their inception in Britain in 1974, and for many years prior to these defining lists. The ambiguity of Johnson's words drew me to the idea of investigating the mechanisms of popular fiction publishing in Britain over the last forty years regardless of whether or not it has the qualifying word 'literary' prefacing it. I decided to look at how the trade operates, to see if it has changed and why; to look at how this trade creates the bestsellers that feature on the lists that Johnson appeared not to know about, and why, in an age where it appears so much money can be made by writing popular fiction there is still a 'disastrous discrepancy between the publisher's profit and that of the writer.'<sup>2</sup>

The word 'bestseller' is perhaps the most overworked word in the popular fiction publishing trade, so much so that its dictionary meaning has become almost irrelevant. Yet the word conjures up an idea; a concept of positiveness; a feeling that something has made it. Why and how that something has made it is a different matter. Robert Escarpit offers a definition of the 'bestseller' in terms both of volume and pace of sales in his 1966 *The Book Revolution*.<sup>3</sup> In diagrammatic form he illustrates how the sales performance of a particular book can term that book a 'fast-seller': where high sales are achieved rapidly and then fade into oblivion; 'steady-seller': where sales start slowly and are maintained steadily over a long

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times* 'Penguin Festival of Fiction', 23 February 1995. p2.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Escarpit, *The Book Revolution*, London: George G Harrap, 1966. p152.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p116/7.

period; or 'best-seller': where it starts as a fast-seller and ends as a steady-seller - the most profitable for the publisher and author alike. John Sutherland uses this diagram in his book about 1970s bestsellers but, as he points out, the term 'bestseller' can also apply to a style of books, as well as an individual book and he recognises the illogicality of referring to an unpublished book as a 'surefire bestseller'.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Escarpit's definitions do not take into account a phenomenon like Barbara Cartland, a bestselling *author* who has sold over 100 million copies of her romances, yet she is unlikely to be found on a bestseller list.<sup>5</sup> But perhaps Sutherland's most salient point is that 'the bestseller is nowadays associated with a high degree of hype and gimmickry'<sup>6</sup> and I will illustrate how true this point remains when I look at how particular bestsellers are created.

I particularly put the term 'popular' in front of the word 'fiction' in the title of the new research proposal as a pertinent indication of the sort of fiction I was intending to examine. However, I very soon found out that just because I put the term 'popular' in front of the word 'fiction' it was not really any indication at all as to the precise type of fiction I was proposing to investigate. The phrase 'popular fiction' is generally used as a faintly derogatory term to describe fiction that is commercial, in the way Johnson has in the quote above about 'commercial writers', but in this thesis the term 'popular fiction' refers to any fictional book that is popular with the general reading public, be it on the bestseller lists or otherwise, and, as Johnson implies, these popular books can be literary - therefore the word 'literature' is a realistic and convenient word to apply to all the books I mention. Thus, it would appear from these definitions that the subject of this thesis is 'commercial popular literature'.

At different historical times words have had different meanings. In a discussion about the origins of the word 'literature' Raymond Williams places the term in context relevant to my

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<sup>4</sup> John Sutherland, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. p6.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p7.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p33. Sutherland defines 'hype' as trade lies! p11.



analysis of the publishing trade and fiction because he links the word 'literature' to the 'bookselling market' thus aligning literature to a form of production:

the first certain signs of a general change of meaning are from C18. **Literary** was extended beyond its equivalence to **literate**: probably first in the general sense of well-read but from mC18 to refer to the practice and profession of writing: 'literary merit' (Goldsmith, 1759); 'literary reputation' (Johnson, 1773). This appears to be closely connected with the heightened self-consciousness of the profession of authorship, in the period of transition from patronage to the bookselling market. Where Johnson had used **literature** in the sense of being highly literate in his *Life of Milton*, in his *Life of Cowley* he wrote, in the newly objective sense: 'an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him in the ranks of literature'. Yet **literature** and **literary**, in these new senses, still referred to the whole body of books and writings; or if distinction was made it was made in terms of falling below the level of polite learning<sup>7</sup> rather than of particular kinds of writing.<sup>8</sup>

But if one continues further with Williams' definition of literature he paraphrases the derogatory sense in which the phrase 'popular literature' is commonly used as 'works which may be *fiction* but are not *imaginative* or *creative*, which are therefore devoid of aesthetic interest, and which are not art'.<sup>9</sup> This definition, therefore, suggests that I should not use the word literature in relation to an investigation into popular fiction yet a dictionary definition: 'fiction = literary works invented by the imagination'<sup>10</sup> implies that I can.

Before embarking on such an investigation it is apparent that my conception of what is considered 'literature' and what others believe it to be has to be discussed because there appear to remain, even at the end of the twentieth century, boundary lines between 'literary' literature and 'popular/commercial' literature as can be seen from the Johnson quote. In 1901 Arnold Bennett complained about these artificial distinctions and appealed to the intellectual minority to understand the majority. He believed that there was no real difference between the popular and highbrow reader:

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<sup>7</sup> In the 18C. literature, as we now know it, was 'polite letters' and letters covered historical, philosophical, moral and political writing, as well as poetry and novels. Polite meant not only well mannered but urbane, cultivated, self-restrained, witty and polished, and for any literary production to be rated 'good' it had to meet those criteria.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, London: Fontana Press, 1990 (first published 1976). p185.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p186.

<sup>10</sup> Collins English Dictionary, 1992.

Not only is art a factor in life; it is a factor in all our lives. The division of the world into two classes, one of which has the monopoly of what is called 'artistic feeling', is arbitrary and false. Everyone is an artist, more or less; that is to say, there is no person quite without that faculty of poetising, which by seeing beauty creates beauty, and which, when it is sufficiently powerful and articulate, constitutes the musical composer, the architect, the imaginative writer, the sculptor and painter. To the persistent ignoring of this obvious truth is due much misunderstanding and some bitterness. The fault lies originally with the minority, the more artistic, which has imposed an artificial distinction upon the majority, the less artistic.<sup>11</sup>

Bennett had been trying to establish a bridge over the gap between 'high' and 'low' culture and it is apparent that nearly one hundred years later Bennett's appeal has been ignored. Johnson's conventional discrimination, in the opening quote, between literary 'novelists' and commercial 'writers' shows that not only is there still a distinction in the type of literature but there is also a semantic distinction among those that write.<sup>12</sup> Comparison between different cultural standards relies on implicit assumptions about what is 'good' and 'bad' and upon value judgements about what is best. Those who have an élitist view of 'high culture' consider it to be superior to mass culture or popular culture which they consider less civilised and less intrinsically worthwhile. A more liberal view might still hold 'high culture' as the yardstick against which other cultural forms are measured but claim that 'popular culture' is not all bad.

The term 'popular' has accumulated a number of contradictory meanings since its original derivation from the Latin word 'popularis' (belonging to the people) which are both negative and positive. As Raymond Williams points out 'popular' may mean: of the people as opposed to their rulers; well-liked or widely favoured; low or base; or, that which presents new or specialised knowledge in an accessible way.<sup>13</sup> Thus any definition of popular culture will

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Fame and Fiction: An Enquiry into Certain Popularities*, London: Grant Richards, 1901. p3, quoted in John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*, London: Faber and Faber, 1992. p155.

<sup>12</sup> I have endeavoured to use the word 'author' throughout this thesis as a courtesy to all those who write the novels for the popular fiction trade although it is not always strictly appropriate since 'author' indicates a writer who is a writer by profession.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, p236.

include 'good' and 'bad' aspects. However, with reference to the ambiguity of meaning, it must be borne in mind that the word 'popular' is often in practice identified with commercialisation. Modern 'popular' culture is frequently just commercial culture, exploiting the needs of the people rather than defining and resolving them, and controlled by people whose paramount interest is in profit rather than artistic quality.<sup>14</sup>

This disparity in cultural standards, particularly in relation to literature, is a phenomenon that came to the fore in the mid-eighteenth century<sup>15</sup> along with the idea that people could be divided up into different 'classes' when merchants and industrialists were beginning to take over control of society.<sup>16</sup> Although they had economic power and later political power they were not culturally powerful. These newly rich capitalists had not come from the upper classes who, apparently, instinctively knew what was correct in all matters relating to behaviour, therefore they needed guidance. To teach them etiquette books, dictionaries and grammars, and rules and standards as regards 'correct' reading matter were published and the knowledge of literature and literary matters gained importance as social assets. Initially their critical mentors had to compete with the clergy in creating values and standards which meant that there was an aesthetic/ethical conflict but as the influence of religion began to recede, because of the impact of scientific discovery and social change, literature became the new 'religion' with its own 'canon' - a very narrow category of creative and imaginative works.<sup>17</sup>

The superiority of this canon of literature was maintained by the newly educated bourgeois who became the new upper class. Originally the aristocracy were the sole members of the

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<sup>14</sup> Arnold Kettle, 'Poor Relations and Rich Publishers', *The Nineteenth-century Novel and its Legacy*, The Open University, Arts: A Third Level Course, A312, Unit 11, Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1986. p16.

<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth discussion on this subject see Raymond Williams *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965. First published by Chatto & Windus, 1961.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, *Keywords*, p61.

<sup>17</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992 (first published 1983). p22/23.

upper class but as this new group of wealthy manufacturers and professionals such as bankers, lawyers, doctors, etc., assumed the lifestyle and propertied status of the older privileged class the two groups merged into the new élite both of which aspired to 'high-brow' culture: activities considered the best or most highly valued in that society. In contrast to them were the working classes who were employed by the manufacturers for the new methods of production and generally considered to have 'low-brow' tastes such as music-hall songs, pub recreations and melodrama.<sup>18</sup> Between these two were the middle classes: the shopkeepers, small farmers, independent employers, etc.<sup>19</sup> whose individual cultural tastes could be high or low brow but from the point of view of culture there were, as now, only two groups - the élite and the masses.

In a series of essays published in 1869 Matthew Arnold<sup>20</sup> referred to the middle classes as 'philistines' because he saw them as unreceptive or hostile towards culture and more concerned with material matters. His influential theory of philistine consciousness was designed to provide an explanation and justification of culture and humane education both of which he believed the philistine lacked, a theory he developed through his work as a schools inspector. He saw high culture as the repository of 'sweetness and light' and he believed that the pursuit of sweetness and light was the pursuit of perfection,<sup>21</sup> an activity which was not solely for one class or another but for everyone. Although Arnold said culture

seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Colin Cunningham, Gill Perry, Dennis Walder, 'Culture and Art', *Culture: Production, Consumption and Status*, The Open University Arts Foundation Course, A102, Unit 22, Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1986. p5/6.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*. p344.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J Dover Wilson, London: Cambridge University Press, 1960. First published in this edition 1932, originally published 1869.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p69.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p69/70

he, nevertheless, divided society into three distinct classes, the Barbarians, the aristocrats, the Philistines, the middle class, and the Populace, the residuum or working class. He elaborates in detail about his reasons for dividing the nation into these three groups before introducing a fourth group: aliens, 'persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection.'<sup>23</sup> This is the group he must have been thinking of when he says that it has 'to be borne in mind...there is a common basis of human nature in everyone' so whichever class we belong to there is a part of the other two within us,<sup>24</sup> thus, if one supports his view, we are all potentially aliens since 'high' and 'low' brow tastes can be found in everyone.

Although mass market literature is considered to be a product of the twentieth century<sup>25</sup> the groundwork was done many years before. By the early nineteenth century there was a huge increase in the production of novels due to the technological developments in the paper and printing industries thereby giving the 'masses' access to fictional literature through 'penny-issue' novels, and for those with a little extra income serialisations, cheap editions and circulating libraries. The introduction of factory-made paper which halved its cost, mechanical printing and the rotary steam press created conditions suitable for the mass production of books and the publishing industry became an industry worth investing in as books became just another commodity and the idea of fiction was promoted as a respectable necessity rather than a self-indulgent luxury.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Long Revolution* Raymond Williams puts forward the idea that the mass-produced fiction of the 1840s offered 'magical resolutions' to the 'real' problems faced by readers in their everyday lives and he also discusses the selective tradition, by which he means certain books are selected for value and emphasis such as Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte and Emily

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p109.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p106.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, Richard Hoggart, *The Way We Live Now*, London: Pimlico, 1996, (first published by Chatto & Windus, 1995), p97.

<sup>26</sup> OU, A312, Unit 11, p8.

Brontë, for example, versus the most widely read writers of that period, Lytton, Marryat, G P R James, etc. He elaborates at length on this tradition and says that 'within a given society, selection will be governed by many kinds of special interest, including class interests'<sup>27</sup> and goes on to quote from *The Times* of 1851 'that persons of the better class who constitute the larger portion of the railway readers lose their accustomed taste the moment they enter the station'<sup>28</sup> thus proving that there was then, as I believe there is now, a certain amount of double standard as regards one's choice of reading matter. Bennett may have believed that he was right in 1901 saying that there was no real difference between the popular and highbrow reader but at that time, as in the 1840s/1850s and the 1990s a section of society was/is not prepared to admit it. His comment that 'nearly all bookish people are snobs, and especially the more enlightened among them. They are apt to assume that if a writer has immense circulation, if he is enjoyed by plain persons, ...he cannot possibly be worth reading and merits only indifference and disdain'<sup>29</sup> is perhaps indicative of his frustration with the literary pundits of that time.

To understand why twentieth century pundits, and those less expert, think the way they do about literature and popular commercial fiction it is necessary to start by looking briefly at the history of literature in academia. The study of vernacular literature with a capital 'L' grew at the end of the nineteenth century when English Literature departments were established in the universities<sup>30</sup> because 'there were women to be considered, and the third rate men who would go on to become schoolmasters'.<sup>31</sup> English literature was a popular subject at that time with ordinary men and women who filled the extra-mural classes all over the country<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*. p68.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p71.

<sup>29</sup> From the literary column of the *Evening Standard*, 19 July 1928. Quoted in Q D Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1968 (first published 1932). p34.

<sup>30</sup> Terry Eagleton gives a good account of this in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Chapter 1.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Begonzi, *Exploding English Criticism, Theory, Culture*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. p41. Quoting William Sanday.

<sup>32</sup> For more details about this form of education see Terry Eagleton, *op.cit.*, and Geoffrey

but there were few teachers to teach them. It was this linkage of literature to the common man and woman that caused much of the fierce opposition to the opening of these departments. C S Lewis' condescending view that 'the student who wants a tutor's assistance in reading the works of his own contemporaries might as well ask for a nurse's assistance in blowing his own nose'<sup>33</sup> can be considered characteristic of the period (1939) when he wrote it but it is that type of view that helped make sure any new study in the future of popular fiction was likely to be relegated to the Cultural Studies departments, where it could be placed alongside other cultural artefacts.

However, there were academics who had been prepared to take the subject of popular fiction seriously. In 1932 Q D Leavis published her pioneering survey of the historical development of popular literature and the effects of journalism and advertising on literary language.<sup>34</sup> She claims to have adopted an 'anthropological approach' to her subject although her élitist attitude conflicts with that assertion. She disparages contemporary popular arts such as radio, film and jazz, and she refuses to acknowledge the cultural gains produced by the Forster Education Act of 1870 which gave increased access to education and reading. Her pessimistic view of the fiction publishing trade and the flood of cheap novels that were produced to satisfy the newly literate lower classes was influenced by that of Henry James in 1899:

The published statistics are extraordinary, and of a sort to engender many kinds of uneasiness. The sort of taste that used to be called 'good' has nothing to do with the matter: we are so demonstrably in [sic] presence of millions for whom taste is but an obscure, confused, immediate instinct. In the flare of railway bookstalls, in the shop-fronts of most booksellers, especially the provincial, in the advertisements of the weekly newspapers, and in fifty places besides, this testimony to the general preference triumphs...<sup>35</sup>

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Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75*, London: Fontana Press, 1989. p89/90.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted by Bernard Bergonzi, *ibid.*, p80. From C S Lewis, 'Our English Syllabus', *Rehabilitations and Other Essays*, London: Oxford University Press, 1939. p91.

<sup>34</sup> Q D Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1968. First published 1932.

<sup>35</sup> Henry James, 'The Future of the Novel', 1899, reprinted in *The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel*, ed. Leon Edel, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957. p49.

James later says that 'the future of fiction is intimately bound up with the future of the society that produces and consumes it'<sup>36</sup> which suggests a very good sociological reason for studying it. And in the 1990s it would appear from my bibliography that the ostracism of popular fiction studies has almost, but not fully, disappeared. Many university English Literature departments, especially in the newer universities, have curbed their prejudices and provide a variety of courses covering all aspects of popular fiction because it has become increasingly clear that the analysis of modern fiction can provide a crucial link between the field of literature and other forms of communication such as film and television. By looking at the creation of particular popular bestsellers and the changes in the book publishing industry over the last forty years I intend to demonstrate this link.

Despite this new enlightenment in some university departments there are still some who suggest that there can be possible drawbacks to researching popular fiction. In the Preface to her book *Classics and Trash*, published in 1990, Harriet Hawkins says 'that until very recently it would most certainly have been, even as in certain circles it may still be, academic suicide to admit to any interest in, much less an enjoyment of, certain works popular with 'bourgeois' (middle-class, middle-brow) audiences.'<sup>37</sup> This idea was reinforced by Janice Radway admitting that she felt that she was 'slumming' when she began her investigation into the Book-of-the-Month Club although she very quickly reversed this opinion.<sup>38</sup> However, I think Hawkins' fears on the whole are unfounded - my bibliography is testimony to the fact that many well-established academics are studying popular fiction with impunity such as John Sutherland, Bridget Fowler, John Fiske, John G Cawelti, etc. Nonetheless Bennett's forthright opinion that 'bookish people are snobs' can still be applied. George Steiner is quoted as saying in 1994: 'I've no right to say to anyone you should read

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p54.

<sup>37</sup> Harriet Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990. pxiv.

<sup>38</sup> Janice A Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle Class Desire*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Chapter 1.



Aeschylus and not Joan Collins, no right whatever. And yet I do. No right but a despotic, unarguable, Neronian conviction.<sup>39</sup>

I agree with Steiner.<sup>40</sup> He has got the right to say whatever he pleases but whereas in 1932 Q D Leavis was able to open her book, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, with the (presumably true) statement: 'In twentieth-century England not only every one can read, but it is safe to add that every one does read'<sup>41</sup> by 1993 the Prime Minister of Britain had to admit that 'one in four of our children leave [sic] secondary school education and can't read properly'.<sup>42</sup> Therefore I strongly disagree with Steiner's view on suitable reading material because if it is a choice between reading Joan Collins or not reading at all then Joan Collins it must be, since if a reader has the ability to read the likes of Joan Collins then there is always the chance that he/she will progress to something better.<sup>43</sup> By 1997 research carried out by the Office of National Statistics showed that 'almost half the adults in Britain lack the reading skills necessary to use a bus timetable or to follow instructions to assemble a bicycle'.<sup>44</sup> This would possibly preclude them from reading even Joan Collins. It is against such an indifference to reading, plus all the other opportunities for personal entertainment, that the modern publishing trade has to compete. Hence their increasing media publicity hype and use of the word 'bestseller' as a means to get noticed.

Yet there are those who believe that the traditional definitions of 'reading' are out of date. 'The concept of reading must be extended, emancipated from its current limitation to the

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<sup>39</sup> George Steiner, quoted by Matthew d'Ancona, *The Times*, 10 February 1994. p14.

<sup>40</sup> Although I think he may have meant Joan's novelist sister Jackie Collins.

<sup>41</sup> Q D Leavis, p3.

<sup>42</sup> Allegedly said by John Major. A quote used by the Periodical Publishers Association in an advertisement in the 'say "No" to VAT on publications' campaign, *THES*, 8 October 1993. (There is no evidence to suggest who made the grammatical mistake - John Major or the transcriber of his words.)

<sup>43</sup> If one believes Matthew Arnold's point that 'an English Barbarian who examines himself will, in general, find himself to be not so entirely a Barbarian but that he has in him, also, something of the Philistine, and even something of the Populace', (p106) then the chances are good that the reader might go on to something better.

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 9 January 1997.

printed word' says Dr Morag Hunter Carsch of the University of Leicester. She believes that it is pointless to make a judgmental comparison between the reading of literature and the reading of television programmes. 'Surely what matters is not the medium but the quality of its form and content and pivotally what the reader does with it.'<sup>45</sup> Her radical idea will not be considered so far fetched when televisions incorporate computers because then it will be possible literally to 'read' the television. Although one does not have to read books to be literate, it will be necessary to be literate to surf the Net and to gain employment in any field where computers are used.

'Reading' the television could be equated with Robert Escarpit's idea of 'passive' reading: a form of reading which he contrasts with 'active' reading,<sup>46</sup> or with C S Lewis' 'unliterary' reading, as opposed to his 'literary' reading.<sup>47</sup> Escarpit's active reader and Lewis' literary reader pays close attention to the text and in doing so brings to bear upon the text all kinds of knowledge he/she already has, without which the meaning of the text could evade him/her; whereas with passive and unliterary reading both authors agree very little attention needs to be paid to the text and the text is only important at the time it is being read. Lewis is appalled by the realisation that the majority of people fail to appreciate the books that he considers to be worth reading<sup>48</sup> but Escarpit is more realistic believing that all readers do both forms of reading at one time or another; the reader as anthologist perhaps, as a collector of different types of material.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 22 October 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Escarpit, p158.

<sup>47</sup> C S Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1965 (first published 1961). p46/47.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* Chapter IV.

<sup>49</sup> This idea poached from Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, London: HarperCollins, 1996. p313.

Alberto Manguel in his eclectic *A History of Reading* neatly summarises various views and opinions on the subject of reading when he quotes Professor Jonathan Rose on the 'five common fallacies to reader response':

- first, all literature is political, in the sense that it always influences the political consciousness of the reader;
- second, the influence of a given text is directly proportional to its circulation;
- third, "popular" culture has a much larger following than "high" culture, and therefore it more accurately reflects the attitudes of the masses;
- fourth, "high" culture tends to reinforce acceptance of the existing social and political order (a presumption widely shared by both the left and the right); and
- fifth, the canon of "great books" is defined solely by social elites. Common readers either do not recognize that canon, or else they accept it only out of deference to elite opinion.<sup>50</sup>

There will always be a gulf between 'high' and 'popular' culture; between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' books, and between the 'élite' and the 'masses' because it is in the interest of those who believe themselves to be superior to maintain it (and it makes good commercial sense to differentiate books) but these terms are only labels affixed to someone's particular prejudice. The reading experience itself cannot be labelled and there is no such person as the common reader; we are all uncommon readers and the experience is different for everyone each time a book, whatever its label, is read.

However, whatever the book, the need to make money, to be profitable, is the prime objective of popular fiction publishing houses, just like it is for supermarkets and chainstore retailers. But why pick on popular fiction publishing? All businesses have to be profitable and appear to be run by accountants. Why should popular fiction publishing be different, different enough to warrant several thousand words? It is not different. It is just the way the publishing houses go about it. A supermarket might feature a particular item such as a new type of jam (or bread if I wanted to keep up the Escarpit connection).<sup>51</sup> It is given a few weeks on the shelves and if it does not sell it is removed and put in a half-price dump bin.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* The quote comes from Jonathon Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A preface to the History of Audiences', in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Escarpit, p158 where he says that 'books are like bread'.

<sup>52</sup> Similar to the '3-for-the-price-of-2', for example, dump bins or tables to be found in most

The supermarket realises that their market research was faulty and reconsiders and looks for another type of jam the customer might like. That is exactly how the popular fiction publishers work. A book has a six week shelf-life and if it does not sell within that limited time it is remaindered and replaced with the next publication. The difference between a supermarket pot of jam and a popular fiction novel is that that pot of jam is probably part of a mass order made in a factory by a team of employees, who are paid an hourly rate for a set number of hours per week regardless of whether or not their pots are sold. Whereas a novel is the product of the imaginative writing abilities of, more often than not, one person (unlike a text book for example which is likely to have been commissioned with the financial details worked out in advance). Months, and sometimes years, of solitary work have been undertaken before it is handed over to an agent or a publisher who might or might not offer a reasonable advance but one unlikely to be anything approaching a level commensurate with the amount of time and work involved. If the author is lucky the publisher will have an effective marketing department that considers the novel worth advertising. If not it is left to the discerning book buying customer (or one of those Martin Seymour-Smith told me about) to find it among all the other publications available. It is the human element in the popular fiction publishing trade that distinguishes it from supermarkets and chainstore retailing and it is the human element, the producer of this single commodity, that is being overlooked in terms of payment; the author is not, on the whole, getting a fair return.

Unlike the waged jam maker the author often cannot make a living from his/her writing and it is more than a play on words in this context to liken the conditions for many of them to those of Grub Street.<sup>53</sup> Yet to apply the current usage of the epithet 'Grub Street' (of the nature of literary hack work) to all those authors struggling to make a living is to imply that the standard of their work is mediocre which is not an assumption that can be made unless

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big High Street bookshops.

<sup>53</sup> 'Grub Street [famous in the 18thC.] was known for poverty, scribbling, calumny, "Scribbling" [sic] was its special occupation.' Pat Rogers, *Hacks and Dunces: Pope, Swift and Grub Street*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1980. p 60.

by failing to get published or failing to sell well it can be implied that mediocrity is the reason. But why should an author expect to be able to make their living from writing? Publishers are not obliged to support them. The decision whether or not to publish is the crux of the whole publishing business and it is based on the subjective judgement of usually one person; the profitability of the company depends on this decision. It is an act of faith on the part of the publisher to publish a first novel, or any subsequent one; it is the publisher who is taking the risk that the book may be a financial disaster. Before a book reaches a buyer a large part of the published price has been taken by the retailer; to facilitate sales the retailer receives a discount from the publisher which varies between 20 and 55 per cent depending on the book and the importance of the customer. Then there are the paper and printing costs, another 12-20 per cent of the published price, the fees to illustrators etc, royalties to the author, and, from the remainder, the publisher has to pay his own staff and operating costs.<sup>54</sup> Thus, from these figures the statement that 'authors do not get a fair return' cannot be justified because it appears that there is nothing left to give the author.<sup>55</sup>

To prove that published authors are overlooked or do not get a fair return is, on the face of it, not easy. Newspapers are constantly reporting stories of how this author or that one has been paid thousands of pounds for their first book, or how another established one has been offered hundreds of thousands as an advance for a further series of books. What the newspapers fail to report, however, is that as a result of one author being offered thousands of pounds there is nothing much left to offer hundreds of others. A variety of bestseller lists further emphasise the idea that lots of authors are selling huge numbers of books thus compounding the idea that all of them are making money. Yes, a lot of them are making money but the vast majority are not.

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<sup>54</sup> Giles Clark, *Inside Book Publishing*, 2nd edn., London: Blueprint, 1994. p9.

<sup>55</sup> For a fuller account of how a book is costed see Giles Clarke, *ibid.* p144-151.

A more detailed consideration of the economics of publishing has to be undertaken in order to understand the discrepancy between the publisher's profit and the author's poverty. The annual accounts of a publishing company reveal all the details but each company is different and the particular type of publisher (adult general, children's, academic, etc.) produces further differences but Giles Clarke gives an overall impression with the following figures:

The total net sales revenue (NSR) is the sum of money the publisher receives from home and export sales after the discounts have been deducted from the published prices. Taking the NSR as 100% and subtracting from that the production costs of the books (say around 30%, plus or minus 5%) plus the write-off of stock unsold (say 2-10%) and the cost of royalties (10-15%), leaves the publisher with a gross profit of say 45-55%. (While a consumer book publisher may suffer from the write-off of unrecoverable authors' advances, it may benefit from significant rights sales income.) From the gross trading profit, the publisher's costs are deducted: e.g. editorial 8-10%; production and design 2-3%; publicity and sales staff 6%; promotion expenditure 5%; sales commission 1-3%; order processing and distribution 10-13%; general and administrative expenses 4-7%. These overheads and expenses roughly total 39-47% which when deducted from the gross trading profit leaves the publisher with a net profit (before interest charges on borrowing and tax are deducted) of say 9-12%.<sup>56</sup>

Out of that remaining 9-12 per cent a dividend may be paid to shareholders after the interest and tax has been paid and what is left can be re-invested in the business.<sup>57</sup> With such a small percentage profit on each book, which could be less if the book does not sell, (but in the days of accountant led companies a publisher is almost duty bound to publish books that will sell well), the problem of author poverty is not going to be resolved. However, these costs and the limited profit margin refer to the original publication. If the book is reprinted, for example, many of the costs Clarke lists as coming from the gross trading profit are not incurred a second time. Therefore the profit margin is much higher, and most publishers carry a backlist of previously published books which can provide a steady flow of income, so, in theory, larger royalties or advances could be paid to the author. The publisher, no doubt, would see things differently: reserves need to be built up so that there are funds to invest in new authors in whom the publisher has confidence will become bestsellers in time, or to offset the costs involved if an author fails to deliver a manuscript on time or if it is not

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p143-144.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p144.

acceptable. And there have to be funds available in case it is considered necessary to pay hundreds of thousands in an advance for the next 'surefire bestseller'.

My definition of popular fiction covers a wide spectrum but it is not always the sales figures that provide the proof that a particular title is popular. As part of my aim to see how bestsellers are created I look in detail at two books, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Satanic Verses*, both from the same publisher, both of them written by well established authors yet both having totally different reasons for being world famous. It was their notoriety that catapulted them into the bestseller lists not the quality of their writing and it was the notoriety that caused many readers to buy the books thus artificially inflating their popularity in terms of sales. Regardless of whether or not it is Escarpit's definition of a 'fast', 'steady' or 'best' seller, it is this sort of dubious bestseller status that can devalue the bestseller lists and give misleading ideas about the genuine popularity of a particular book. Although I have selected only two books as examples of this type of created popularity there are many instances of books gaining bestsellerdom status due to their controversial content.<sup>58</sup>

Looking in detail at books that have become popular through whatever means does not do anything to help prove my point that authors are generally poorly rewarded but they are examples of how the publishing trade has changed. There have always been books that have stood out from the rest but there are few that have gained the world's attention like these two have. That in itself is a sign of the times. By tracing the history of particular bestsellers through four decades and by looking at the conditions that created them the changes in the book publishing world in general have also become apparent. These changes have come about because the two main themes which are paramount for most large businesses today, and the book business is a very large business, are globalisation and technology. Technology is making communication instantaneous, telescoping the world into a single marketplace by clicking on a mouse which means that the book publishing trade is now no longer hampered

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<sup>58</sup> For example: *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis in 1991.

by national boundaries and languages. This multi-media business world was beginning to emerge in 1960 when the United States publishing industry began a series of mergers and incorporation into conglomerates. In Britain we were preoccupied with the Lady Chatterley trial although there was fear that the British publishing trade would be taken over by the Americans, an unrealised fear at the time, but forty years later it would be difficult to classify a large publishing business as wholly British or wholly American. Regardless of the worldwide economic problems of the 1970s and 1980s and the gloomy predictions relating to the imminent demise of the book publishing business, the British book market remains buoyant as it moves into the twenty-first century.

In the multi-sectioned first chapter I have produced an overview of the popular fiction and publishing business over the last forty years culminating with the harsh economic realities of the 1990s. I start by looking at the main changes in the trade. The Publisher Accounts Clearing House (PACH) system was introduced in the late 1950s to try and sort out the amount of paperwork that was generated by the trade; a very clumsy forerunner to computerisation. I have reviewed this pre-1960 system because of its effect on the 1960s, as I have done with several other topics where their pre-1960 history is relevant. One example is the development of the paperback which revolutionised the trade in the 1950s. By 1960 it was an established part of it and with the increase in the price of paper and the increased production costs for hardbacks the cheaper paperback has played an important role in keeping the 1990s popular fiction publishing trade in business.

The Standard Book Numbering (SBN) classification, a system which allows the trade to differentiate between hardback and paperback books, was introduced in Britain in 1967. Three years later it became the International Book Numbering (ISBN) system. Also introduced in the 1960s was the Charter Group, which has been superseded by specialist market research agencies. The Traditional Market Agreement was abolished in 1974. This was a minor happening in Britain as a whole compared to the energy crisis that followed the miners' strike, and in a world where worldwide inflation helped to cause dramatic increases



in the cost of fuel, food and material, but a major development for the buying and selling of international rights in the publishing trade.

Small sections on Book Fairs and Book Clubs precede the background to the Net Book Agreement. This was a source of dissension among publishers, booksellers and book buyers which was eventually abolished in 1997 after years of disagreements, court orders and appeals to the European Court. In line with other European states the Public Lending Right (PLR) was finally set up by Act of Parliament in 1979 to give writers and illustrators the opportunity to benefit financially for the free lending out of their books by public libraries. By looking at the way the system works, who gains and who loses and the future of the scheme, as well as looking at the current position of the public libraries, I show that despite the apparent flourishing of the book trade, the person who produces the commodity on which they thrive is, on the whole, poorly recompensed. The final section of the first chapter deals with the various types of bestseller lists, how the wholesalers classify fiction, and there is a brief look at some of the new erotic imprints which have gained respectability.

In the first chapter there is evidence to show that the way forward for the popular fiction publishing trade has been through a procession of events that reflect a business that in the 1990s relies totally on a profitable balance sheet. In the following two chapters I select certain aspects of the trade that stand out as factors in my forty-year time span as being significant harbingers of change, and they also contribute to the understanding of how bestsellers are created because, as John Sutherland says:

one is rarely tempted to detach the bestseller from the specific conditions of its typically brief bestselling existence. And what is useful about such culturally embedded works is what they tell us about the book trade, the market place, the reading public and society generally at the time they have done well.<sup>59</sup>

The first aspect is a relatively new phenomenon, the rise of the literary agent. This came to my attention when *The Horse Whisperer* was published in 1995 and Nicholas Evans' agent,

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<sup>59</sup> Sutherland, p5.

Caradoc King, received almost as much press attention as Evans. With a brief history of literary agencies as a forerunner I have looked at the huge increase in the number of agents and agencies. It is the emergence of the agent into the limelight alongside his/her writer which is changing the way authorial contracts are being constructed.<sup>60</sup> I have assessed two surveys about the interaction between authors and their agents conducted by the Society of Authors in the 1990s and noted their findings and their differences but, on the whole, authors remain poorly remunerated. This means that literary agents have not justified their original reason for existence.

It could be argued that far from improving the prospects for authors agents are making matters worse. There are newspaper reports which suggest that there is a new breed of agent (similar to those who control footballers' transfer fees) who appears to have no qualms about persuading big name authors to transfer their custom to them, and in their business dealings they play one publisher off against another to secure a bigger and better deal for their author which therefore results in a larger percentage for themselves, but due to the confidential relationship between the agent and his/her client these reports are not verified. By negotiating these increasingly larger unearned advances they are depriving publishers of finance that could have been used to encourage new authors, or the maintenance of authors yet to reach their peak. It is these multiples of thousands of pounds or dollars that make the press headlines, leading the general public to believe that writing books is a lucrative occupation. It is for some but as the advances get bigger for the select few, the more the rest suffer or fail to get published.

Much has been written on literary prizes, the second aspect of the trade I have singled out, because it is a contentious issue. It needs to be looked at because prizes play an increasing

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<sup>60</sup> *Publishers Weekly* published a cartoon by Mort Gerberg which summed up this new type of agent succinctly. It shows a large poster almost covering a bookshop window saying in varying size type on ten lines: 'Appearing today/ at 12.00 noon/ CLYDE ESTEEM/ America's most powerful/ LITERARY AGENT/ who will autograph copies/ of the new Winna Merlz/ NOVEL/ HE JUST SOLD FOR/ \$9 MILLION!' 3 March 1989.

part in the way the general public think about popular fiction and the modern publishing industry. I have found ample supplies of newspaper articles about the subject, many of which I refer to, where literary pundits offer their illuminating views on the winners and losers of various prizes. As well as looking at prizes I have also looked briefly at awards and bursaries because this is one area where the author is taken particularly into consideration. As the Royal Society of Literature so rightly points out in their information pack everything is confidential as regards these funds, so it is not possible to assess whether or not there is an increase in author poverty, although a spokesperson did admit that all their funds are constantly in use<sup>61</sup> which suggests a continuing need. Unfortunately there are still no real answers to the question of how to relieve the author's relative poverty.

The Booker Prize is the favourite one for the media to lambast or congratulate, which therefore makes it the one most well known to the general public, but with an ever increasing number of prizes and awards I have had to be selective in my choice of prizes to consider. It is in considering the Booker Prize in particular that research often stresses the literary nature of the prize-winning books. The literariness or otherwise of a book does not detract from its popularity overall so I have made a point of not introducing that argument as a feature of the chapter. However, for the majority of this chapter I found that I had to rely predominately on the 'mounds of press cuttings or anecdotal feedback from the trade' just as the freelance arts journalist, Al Senter, had had to do in November 1993 when he wrote an article for *The Bookseller*,<sup>62</sup> thus limiting the scope of research to a very narrow domain.

In the following four chapters I have taken one novel published in each of the four decades covered by this thesis and looked at it in detail. One of the criteria for my choice of books was to have a publishing date as close as possible to the beginning and to the end of my forty-year period. The reason for this was to show any changes in the way the particular

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<sup>61</sup> Personal telephone conversation, October 1997.

<sup>62</sup> 19 November 1993, p28.

book was presented to the reading public which in turn could be used as an illustration of change as a whole. I could have chosen any number of books but space limited me to one book per decade. I also chose these novels because they are steady sellers and still available in the book shops at the end of the twentieth century and therefore they doubly qualify as popular fiction. Two of the books are considered 'literary', *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D H Lawrence and *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, and the other two are what Johnson would call 'commercial' (ie having profit as the main aim) *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough and *The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans. By choosing these four books and introducing them with the prescriptive terms Daniel Johnson used in the opening quotation, I am stressing my point that fiction can be termed popular regardless of the appellation associated with it. The fact that there is only one woman author to three men is by pure chance. I am not of the opinion that one sex writes better than the other. By choosing these four particular books I aim to show the different ways the trade has created bestsellers - thereby producing a very fair return for these four particular authors.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover*<sup>63</sup> was originally published in 1928 but my reason for using it as an example of 1960s popular reading matter was the publication of the unexpurgated paperback edition in 1960 at 3/6 (17½ pence) following its trial under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. This was the first time the unexpurgated novel had become officially available to the general public in hardback or paperback and therefore I felt that it was a valid choice despite its earlier publication date. It was seen as a major publishing coup both for the publishers, Penguin, and for the rights of readers to read what they wished, or what their publishers persuaded them they wanted to read. I have written only a brief account of the history of this novel because it has been so well documented previously but I have added to this information about the trial that has only been alluded to in the past. This information has only recently become available to researchers with the permission of Penguin. These trial

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<sup>63</sup> The original draft of the chapter on this novel previously appeared in *The Journal of the D H Lawrence Society*, D H Lawrence Society, Eastwood, 1999.

details are from the point of view of Michael Rubinstein, Sir Allen Lane's solicitor, who recently deposited all his paperwork relating to the trial in the Penguin Archive at Bristol University. It also includes some interesting post-trial developments. Details of unlikely candidates approached to be witnesses for the defence, why some agreed to appear and those who did not - the literary world was not universal in its approval of this novel, and the prepared answers to questions the prosecution might ask are just some of the details looked at, which all helped to produce a book that could be defined by Escarpit as a fast seller that settled down to become a steady seller.

Currently there is a view that as paperbacks are relatively cheap and/or are of no literary significance they are only fit for holiday reading on aeroplanes and beaches and then should be discarded<sup>64</sup> but this was not the view of Allen Lane who from the beginning published across a broad spectrum and envisaged his paperbacks as quality books. As Counsel said during the 1960 Lady Chatterley obscenity trial, Lane's intention was 'to publish in a form and at a price which the ordinary people could afford to buy, all the great books of our culture'. He had started his paperback publishing venture in 1935 to provide good quality contemporary fiction at a low price and by the 1960s Penguin were an institution in Britain controlling about 85 per cent of all paperbacks sold, which amounted to a 75,000,000 British production figure in 1961, of which 50,000,000 were sold in Britain.<sup>65</sup> Penguin's continued worldwide appeal is illustrated by the story told by Terry Waite while a hostage in Lebanon. He tried to get across to his jailers that he wanted a book to read. He drew a picture of a bird within an oval and told his captors: 'Find me a book with this on its spine and it will be a

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<sup>64</sup> This generalisation about paperbacks is, I suspect, a reference to the A format paperbacks (18x11cms) which are usually 'mass market'. The B format larger sized paperbacks (19.75x12.5cms) are usually 'middle to highbrow' and following hardback or C format publication. C format are the so-called 'trade paperbacks', a still larger size of paperback. These can be editions that follow hardback publication, but they are increasingly replacing it in the shape of 'paperback originals' usually followed by B format publication eight months to a year later. (Format details from Alan Hamilton, *The Guardian*, 9 January 1999.)

<sup>65</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. p68. The catalogue published to accompany the exhibition *Fifty Penguin Years* at the Royal Festival Hall, London, 21 September - 27 October 1985.

good book.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately we are not told whether or not Waite got his book but the distinctive 'penguin in an oval', the 'dignified but flippant' logo requested by Lane of his production staff,<sup>67</sup> is a design masterpiece and has ensured that the reading public are never in doubt about the publisher of the book at which they are looking.

It was the fact that Lane wanted to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in paperback that caused the outcry. Its so-called pornographic content ('The peculiar property of a good novel...is the series of shocks it gives to the reader's preconceptions'<sup>68</sup>) would have been irrelevant if Lane had been proposing to publish it in hardback thus restricting it by price to a more affluent readership. But it was a hypocritical outcry because, as Rubinstein's papers show, there were paperbacks already on the market with similar content, and it was also somewhat hypocritical to suggest that Lane was publishing *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for the sake of proliferating our cultural heritage to 'ordinary people'. Its publication was a clever marketing ploy which was very profitable for Penguin and it also raised public awareness of the company that was soon to be launched on the stock market.

In the next chapter a very different book is looked at. I have tried, without success, to find out if anyone's religious sensibilities were hurt by *The Thorn Birds* but, as I found when researching the chapter on prizes, my main source of information had to be press cuttings and the press did not appear to see religion as being of importance in relation to this book. I did, however, find a mention of *The Thorn Birds* in a study of the Catholic novel in British literature but it is dismissed as merely an example of the sensational combination of sex and

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Michael Lynton, *The Times*, 22 May 1998. p41.

<sup>67</sup> Lane suggested an animal or bird; his secretary, Joan Coles, came up with the idea of a penguin, and Edward Young, of the Production Department, went to London Zoo to sketch one. *Fifty Penguin Years*, p16.

<sup>68</sup> '...it [the novel] provides a configuration of special circumstances which serve as a start for our mental habits and show us the necessity for revising them.' p256, Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*. Leavis sees George Eliot (*The Mill on the Floss*) as being 'the first novelist to be conscious of this most important function of the novel' (p256) and then refers to Lawrence's similar views on the novel (p329) by using a quote from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

religion.<sup>69</sup> Colleen McCullough takes a sideswipe at the Roman Catholic Church in *The Thorn Birds* but as the religious affairs journalist Clifford Longley<sup>70</sup> says: 'Perhaps Catholics in Britain are so used to attacks on the Church that they no longer notice them'. He concludes by saying that he suspects 'the book was just not good enough to land any hard punches'.<sup>71</sup> This view, that the book is not good, I surmise is the general view among academic critics because apart from John Sutherland, who looks at it in *Best Sellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s*, there is very little general academic criticism. This is not surprising since the book has no high-brow pretensions. It would no doubt be classed as 'trash' in an academic book shop. There is some criticism, however, from the feminist critics such as Cora Kaplan and Heather Wearne<sup>72</sup> because it is classified as a romance and romances tend to reinforce the ideology of patriarchy in their view. It is a book written unashamedly for the commercial market and the book buying public liked it sufficiently well to buy millions of copies when it was published originally in 1977 and they have continued to buy it ever since. It has been republished several times, most recently in 1995, and I have looked at how it was turned into a mini-series for television because the film makers could not reduce it to film length. This spawned a follow-up that was shown on television as an antidote to the football World Cup in 1998 and it has been reduced to 3,000 words as an advanced text for the Penguin Readers series, Level 6.<sup>73</sup>

Clifford Longley saw *The Thorn Birds* as 'a bit of a non-event' and he wondered why I should choose this book as representative of the 1970s. In selecting the books the aim was not to

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Woodman, *Faithful Fictions: The Catholic Novel in British Literature*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991. p149.

<sup>70</sup> Clifford Longley writes prolifically on religion, politics, morality, society, etc.

<sup>71</sup> Personal letter, 18 August 1997.

<sup>72</sup> Cora Kaplan, 'The Thorn Birds: Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity', *Sea Changes: Essays of Culture and Feminism*, London: Verso, 1986.

Heather Wearne, 'Contemporary Culture, Romance Fiction and *The Thorn Birds*', *Meanjin*, Vol 51 (1), 1992.

<sup>73</sup> 'Penguin Readers is a series of simplified stories which introduces you step-by-step to the literature that has made Penguin Books world famous', says the blurb on the back cover of the book.

use them to represent the decade but to use them as examples of popular fiction publishing happenings in that decade. *The Thorn Birds* is on my book shelves as it still is in millions of households twenty plus years after publication which authenticates its position as an exceptionally steady seller and I wanted something totally different from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. I decided that as *The Thorn Birds* was number five and McCullough was the highest placed female writer on the *Publishers Weekly* All-Time First Fiction Bestsellers 1945-1991 list (see Appendix I), there must be reasons for its popularity apart from effective hyping. But, from the particular point of view of this thesis, I had two reasons for choosing it. The first was that the Traditional Market Agreement had recently been abolished and Australian fiction became available on the free market, and in the case of this specific book it gave the insular American and British readership a glimpse of another world, which may partly account for its popularity. The second reason was that the book trade had realised through surveys in the early 1970s that women readers accounted for 60 per cent of all novels sold and I thought that this book was an excellent example of the sort of novel that appealed to women readers despite its not having the conventional 'happy ending'. Although it does not follow all the formulaic conventions of the popular fiction romance genre there are sufficient for the book to be classified as a romance.

In considering this novel I reflect on the idea of whether or not the ideology of the Roman Catholic Church, which permeates the book, is a result of McCullough's own Roman Catholic upbringing, which she appears to repudiate in the text, although the philandering priest theme is not new. I look at the available feminist criticism and the reviews in various Australian magazines. Finally, I examine the differences between the book and the televised version and discuss the difficulties in scripting a novel of this size.

The four books in my selection have naturally fallen into two pairs, *The Thorn Birds* / *The Horse Whisperer* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* / *The Satanic Verses*, not only because of the prescriptive 'commercial' and 'literary' terms attached to them and the fact that the second pair share a publisher, Penguin. The second pair are both books written by authors with long



publishing records which suggests the reading public would have been aware of their books and style of writing thus any new publication would have been greeted with interest and expectations of something similar, unless something unusual happened like a highly publicised court case preceeding its publication. Therefore in 1988, when *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie was published, the general public were not prepared for the impact it caused. His readers would have known about his previous propensity for mixing political fact and fiction in his novels but very few would have expected the response that this novel engendered.

Britain saw riots in Brixton, Toxteth, Moss Side and Tottenham in the first eight years of the 1980s all attributed to racial differences. It was against this background that *The Satanic Verses* was published and the earlier race riots, which I believe influenced the writing of this book, multiplied worldwide as revulsion was fomented in the Islamic world against it. This book, which was written by an established self-proclaimed literary author, led to appalling consequences yet reputedly had a minimal readership despite sales of over 1,000,000 hardback copies which suggests that when it comes to creating bestsellers readers are unnecessary.

At the time I was selecting books for this thesis, there was still a lot of press attention being paid to *The Satanic Verses* and Salman Rushdie so I chose it because it aptly illustrated how a bestseller could be made despite its minimum readership. It is a relevant choice because it shows another aspect of the changing publishing world and how it related to one company. Due to the ability of communication systems to transmit information at the touch of a button that one company's decision to publish reverberated around the world causing numerous problems for other publishing companies and all the other relevant companies that were involved with publishing this book. Despite strong recommendations not to publish, because some of the repercussions were foreseen, Viking Penguin went ahead and, it would appear,

let commercial considerations<sup>74</sup> take precedence over moral ones with fatal consequences. This mis-placed confidence in their ability to read the book market place against the advice of those whose opinions were unfavourable was an unacknowledged disaster for the company. They were vilified across the Islamic world and caused deep divisions in the solidarity of the worldwide publishing trade. It is these divisions in the trade that confirmed my choice of *The Satanic Verses* as a book to study in depth because in 1960, when Penguin published *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, there was almost universal support from fellow publishers. Twenty-eight years later that support was far from general. Book publishers were having to compete in a world market that was embracing many more sources of personal entertainment; therefore individual publishers could not afford to be seen to be supporting Penguin. The profitability of their companies would not allow it. This was evident when David Caute, a well established author, could not find a company to publish his book *Fatima's Scarf* because its subject was similar to *The Satanic Verses*. Caute solved the problem by publishing it himself and his publishing house, Totterdown Books, benefited from any profit that may or may not have been made.

*The Satanic Verses* is classified as fiction, hence my justification for selecting it, but there is a lot of fact included in the text, and it is those facts, (or fictions, depending on the reader's viewpoint), that caused the furore. This mixing of fact and fiction, known since about 1970 as 'faction',<sup>75</sup> has always been commonplace in novels. (A very early example is Aphra Behn with *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* in 1688, but more recent examplars are Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1966) and Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*, (1968)). Readers often need a common cultural background to understand references and allusions made in this type of novel to fully understand the significance of all or parts of the

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<sup>74</sup> I have no evidence as to what Penguin's considerations were but it is suggested by Michael Hanne, 'Salman Rushdie: "The Satanic Verses" (1988)', *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*, Providence: Berghahn Books, 1994, (p199) that a \$800,000, or £800,000, advance was paid to Rushdie for this book.

<sup>75</sup> According to Margaret Drabble in her 1990 edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, p336.

text and in this instance it is the general reading public's lack of knowledge of Islam and that the words of the Koran are considered sacrosanct that helped cause the protests. I have outlined the objections, looked at all the difficulties caused by the fatwa, and assessed the result, but whatever else is said about this book I believe Rushdie was trying to indicate, in a fictional text, the poor state of race relations in Britain in the 1980s. He had spoken previously about the responsibility of black writers in a predominately white society to draw attention to the plight of Asian immigrants because he believed the national press in Britain was prejudiced against the ethnic minorities. Therefore it was difficult for their views to be heard.<sup>76</sup>

Finally I look at my fourth book, *The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans. It sums up the popular fiction publishing trade at the end of my forty-year period. The book has become a commodity that can be sold to the highest bidder in an auction. *The Horse Whisperer* has yet to make the same sort of impact as the other three and possibly never will but that in itself is a sign of the times - the term 'bestseller' is now so devalued it is applied to almost any book that invites publicity. It might remain just one of the many considerably hyped first novels, written by a photogenic and articulate author - ideal for television and public appearances, which attracted a huge advance, worldwide rights and an enviable film contract in a short space of time. However, its enthusiastic British publisher believes it will become a classic and in years to come it will be a set text on school curricula.

Choosing a single example of popular fiction as indicative of the entire publishing output of a decade is inevitably highly selective but I chose this book specifically for its mid-1990s publication date so that its progress, or otherwise, could be recorded to the end of the century to see if the hype (or 'trade lies' as Sutherland calls hype) was just hype or really a reflection of the initial enthusiasm the British and American publishers had for this book.

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<sup>76</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Minority Literatures in a Multi-Cultural Society', *Displaced Persons*, eds. Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford, Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1988. p42.

The reading public repaid the publishers for their enthusiasm by nominating it for The Top 100 Waterstone's Books of the Century (see Appendix II) where it is placed at number one hundred. However, it has to be borne in mind that this list was compiled at a time when the film of *The Horse Whisperer* and the film linked paperback was still being promoted in the bookshops and therefore still very much in the public consciousness. Thus its listing has to be contested as a valid indication of its real popularity. But the fact that it is listed is sufficient to ensure that researchers in years to come will initially see this book as one of the most popular books of the 1990s.

I conclude with assessing the changes and challenging any pessimistic views about the state of the publishing trade and acknowledge that the art of creating bestsellers is thriving as we move into the new millennium. The authors, however, are not.

## CHAPTER 1

### Popular Fiction and Publishing 1960s-1990s

In 1960 the then Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, went to South Africa and made a speech in which he used the now familiar words 'winds of change'. Although he was referring to the growth of national consciousness in South Africa the phrase can be appropriated and made applicable to the publishing industry from that date as the 'winds of change' blew away the last vestiges of the idea that publishing was a profession for gentlemen and replaced it with the computer literate hard-headed businessmen and women of today.

The idea that publishing used to be a profession for gentlemen probably came about because so many Oxbridge graduates entered the business and many of the early companies were family owned and passed from father to son. Yet despite the many nostalgic memoirs and biographies about publishers and publishing it always was a hard-headed business; money had to be made, otherwise the companies would have collapsed. Michael S Howard, whose connection with the company suggests he could be biased, gives an account of the 'gentlemenly conduct' of publishers in the first half of the twentieth century in his history of Jonathan Cape.<sup>1</sup> He outlines a more casual or trusting way of doing business, when contracts were signed months or sometimes years after the books were published; there was time to read the manuscripts that came into their offices and to give personal attention to their authors, and it was not considered necessary to have an accountant to handle the finances.<sup>2</sup> Publishing was still a small-scale trade and there was less competition and good books were expected to sell according to their merits - the promotion of books was thought to be a vulgar business.<sup>3</sup> Howard's father, G Wren Howard, and Herbert Jonathan Cape set up the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael S Howard, *Jonathan Cape Publisher*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> An accountant joined the firm in 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Howard, p222. According to Howard there was very little advertising space in newspapers

publishing house with their first list appearing in 1921. From the beginning Cape made regular trips to America to find new books and authors and in answer to booksellers who queried why he published so many American books he replied: 'people *must* be interested in America'<sup>4</sup> which shows a degree of prescience about the future international character of the publishing trade. In their first year they offered H G Wells an advance of £2,500, or £3,000 for the American rights as well, for his next novel which shows that large advances are not new, although in this case the amount offered was a large part of the company's resources at the time.<sup>5</sup> T E Lawrence,<sup>6</sup> on whose writings Wren Howard believed the firm was built, was concerned that the publication of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* 'might bust them'<sup>7</sup> which indicates a close relationship between the author and his publisher, and Howard also illustrates how there was more opportunity to nurture authors through their early efforts:

For Jonathan a fifth novel held an almost mystical significance. He believed that it established firmly an author's reputation, or made the breakthrough to success if the beginnings had been slow. For five books his confidence would be sustained, and only after that would he admit to disillusion if his expectations were not satisfied.<sup>8</sup>

In this instance the fifth novel was *Precious Bane* by Mary Webb which did become a bestseller after the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, praised it in a speech given to the Royal Literary Fund in April 1928.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately Mary Webb never benefitted from her success as she died in October 1927 after complaining 'that the British public did not pay fairly for

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for promoting books in the 1940s so occasionally sandwich-men would parade outside the firm's offices advertising a particular book. p189.

<sup>4</sup> Howard, p46.

<sup>5</sup> Howard, p63.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence referred to Cape as 'a new publisher of the respectable sort' in a letter to Bernard Shaw, 27 October 1922. *Selected Letters of T.E. Lawrence*, Edited by David Garnett, Oxford: Alden Press, 1938.

<sup>7</sup> Howard, p83.

<sup>8</sup> Howard, p98.

<sup>9</sup> A similar thing happened when President Kennedy revealed that Ian Fleming's *From Russia, With Love* was one of his favourite books - Fleming became very fashionable in America. Howard, p263.

her work.'<sup>10</sup> (Neither did the 'gentlemenly' publishers until 1919 when the 'baker's dozen' clause was removed from the standard publisher's contract. This was a clause that allowed the the publisher to count 13 sales as 12, and to pay royalties on the lower figure.)<sup>11</sup>

Publishing in wartime was difficult due to the shortage of paper and conscription of staff which meant that Jonathan Cape 'was living on its capital of back-list stock which could not be replenished'<sup>12</sup> but due to the increasing demand for books through the war years anything published could be sold, except George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Despite a contract being offered to Orwell a senior official in the Ministry of Information 'appealed to [Cape's] patriotism with a plea not to disturb relations with our Russian allies at this juncture'<sup>13</sup> so the offer was withdrawn.<sup>14</sup> Post-war publishing saw a need for cheaper books for a much larger reading public. This rise in the readership of fiction was due to the development of mass paperback production and the growth of higher education.

Cheap books had been introduced by Jonathan Cape in 1926 with 'The Travellers' Library' retailing at 3/6 (17½ p), in 1930 the 'Life and Letters' series at 4/6 (22½ p) and in 1932, to counteract a world-wide slump in the book trade, Florin Books, at 2/- (10p). The popularity of these cheap editions was thought to have inspired Allen Lane's mass-produced paperbacked reprints<sup>15</sup> of which six of the first ten, and three of the next ten, came from the Cape list in 1935.<sup>16</sup> Selling these at sixpence (2½ p) each, the same price as a packet of cigarettes, '...like everybody else in the trade [Cape] thought [Lane] would go bust.'<sup>17</sup> By

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<sup>10</sup> Howard, p99.

<sup>11</sup> Howard, p50/51.

<sup>12</sup> Howard, p196.

<sup>13</sup> Howard, p179.

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps a similar form of governmental intervention might have saved a few lives if it had been used in 1988 when the debate about whether or not to publish *The Satanic Verses* was going on.

<sup>15</sup> Howard, p137.

<sup>16</sup> Howard, p164.

<sup>17</sup> Howard, p164.

1934 booksellers and publishers had recognised that a new reading public existed but that only Woolworth's and tuppenny libraries were catering for it. At the same time, it was clear to Allen Lane, the Managing Director of The Bodley Head, that the company was in serious financial trouble. The need to solve these two problems, freely available quality books at a price the new readers could afford and solvency for the company, is thought to have been the impetus behind the idea of cheap paperback books, and despite all the dire prognostications from the rest of the publishing trade it worked<sup>18</sup> and it was the beginning of the end for publishers' own cheap editions. As Penguins proliferated additions to the three Jonathan Cape cheap series diminished and then ceased.<sup>19</sup>

The earliest competition for Penguins came from Guild Books which were paperback reprints from the lists of several publishers who collaborated to form the British Publishers Guild in 1941 because of the wartime shortages. These books were variously priced at sixpence (2½ p), ninepence (3¾ p) or a shilling (5p) depending on their size<sup>20</sup> but they were never likely to put Penguin out of business because by that date Penguin Books was firmly established as the leader in the field of paperback publishing in Britain. There were other paperback companies in Britain such as Pan Books, which was started in 1944 as an independent subsidiary of the Book Society, but its number of titles was small in comparison with Penguin because their way of doing business was to keep the minimum number of books in print and sell more, whereas Penguin concentrated on building a large backlist.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. p13. This well presented and lavishly illustrated paperback history of Penguin Books was published to accompany the exhibition 'Fifty Penguin Years' at the Royal Festival Hall, London, 21 September - 27 October 1985.

Ian Norrie, in the 6th Edition of *Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century*, London: Bell & Hyman, 1982, also outlines a history of Penguin, p160-165.

<sup>19</sup> Howard, p165.

<sup>20</sup> Howard, p191.

<sup>21</sup> 'In 1955 they had 150 titles in print and sold 8 million books; Penguin had 1,000 and sold 10 million.' Norrie, p166.



Penguin separated from Bodley Head in January 1936 and within a year had sold 3 million paperbacks. In 1937 the Pelican imprint was introduced to cover serious contemporary issues and these represented the first new and original books to be published by Penguin.<sup>22</sup> Penguin Specials introduced in 1939, covered aspects of world economics, politics, and wartime topics such as *Aircraft Recognition*, which was used by civilians and the fighting forces to distinguish enemy planes.<sup>23</sup> Despite paper shortages and air raids King Penguins were also launched in 1939. These were hardbacked and cost a shilling (5p) and came with coloured illustrations, hence the increase in price,<sup>24</sup> and they provided reading material for the troops and all those left behind,<sup>25</sup> while children were catered for with Puffin Picture Books and Puffin Story Books.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the war, Penguin was distributing a million books a month in the American market from their base in New York and also had a subsidiary in Australia.<sup>27</sup> In 1946 Penguin Classics was launched with E V Rieu's translation of Homer's *The Odyssey*<sup>28</sup> which remained Penguin's bestselling book until their publication of the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960.

The 'paperback revolution', as it has become generally known, really was a revolution in the book publishing trade because book buying was no longer the preserve of a small section of society. Paperbacks were cheap yet they were prominently displayed in traditional

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<sup>22</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, p25.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Schmoller says: 'Perhaps the substantial part which the Penguin Specials played in changing public attitudes towards the need to fight Hitler and in stimulating the debate about postwar Britain and the postwar world has not yet been sufficiently recognised.' p303. 'The Paperback Revolution', *Essays in the History of Publishing: in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the House of Longman 1724-1974*, edited by Asa Briggs, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Schmoller gives details about the difficulties involved in early mass production printing methods such as paper quality, ink not drying fast enough, the inclusion of illustrations, etc. p314-317.

<sup>25</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, p35.

<sup>26</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, p40.

<sup>27</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, p44 and p49.

<sup>28</sup> *Fifty Penguin Years*, p52.

bookshops as well as railway stations, airports and other similar outlets; and the old childhood rules about treating books as precious objects were discarded since text books, for example, which were mass produced for schools and universities, could be annotated, stuffed into pockets, read in the bath, used as beer mats, etc. and generally treated as disposable items. Books became commonplace and available to all who wanted them.

Along with all the other publishers Jonathan Cape and Penguin Books began to feel the effects of the 'winds of change' in the late 1950s with the introduction of the Publisher Accounts Clearing House (PACH) system, followed by the launch of the International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) classification in the 1960s, and as the recession, union problems, and paper price rises hit the book trade in the 1970s and 1980s the publishing houses were forced to specialise, to reorganise, and to establish themselves as businesses responsible to shareholders expecting reasonable returns on their investments. In the 1990s, there is a market driven industry made up of multiple small specialist publishers nearly all of whom depend on a small number of large multi-media conglomerates to provide a financial safety net, thus allowing the book trade to flourish, despite the advent of the Internet.

With the 1990s book publishing industry changing month by month as regards who owns whom, which company publishes which book, types of printed matter and the new forms of electronic and Internet publishing, the means for researching it have changed too. In February 1995, Book House Training Centre, the Industry Training Organisation, responded to the difficulties experienced by many student researchers and academics in obtaining titles on book and journal publishing by launching a Book Publishing Books catalogue. However, the 1999 catalogue features no new book titles relating to general book publishing, but many more relating to management skills, marketing, production and electronic publishing, which is a clear indication of the direction publishing is going. Academic books on the subject of pre-1990s publishing are, on the whole, gloomy about the state of the industry and its chances of surviving the electronic age because there are so many other entertainment

facilities available. So too are many of the newspaper and trade magazines of that period, but by moving away from these publications and looking towards market research companies, for example, it can be seen that the current book publishing industry, though changed, is buoyant. However, the many changes over the last forty years have commodified the sale of books in ways most likely never envisaged by those working in it in the first half of this century.

In the concluding chapter of his book *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*,<sup>29</sup> Joseph McAleer says that the most important influence upon popular publishing between 1914 and 1950 was war, but as he was completing his book the signs indicating the next great upheaval in the publishing world were beginning to be seen - computerisation. Publishers were slow to use this new technology but they knew that their inefficient ordering system where orders were sent to publishers written on scraps of paper, or on forms of various dimensions, with different methods of delivery and charges, had to be standardised. In 1958 several publishers got together and devised a simple order form with five carbon copies, one of which served the publisher as an invoice. Eighty-four publishers accepted this PACH system and any bookseller who used it gained preferential terms with these publishers, but by 1971 the computerised system had taken over.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Charter Group**

Prior to the 1960s labour was relatively cheap, postal rates were low, and there was a smaller number of new titles each year. This meant that if a customer wanted to buy a new book that was not in stock at the local book shop it could be ordered and delivered quickly. Book shop

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. p247.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Norrie, *Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century*, 6th ed., London: Bell & Hyman, 1984. p99. Although Norrie says eighty-four publishers used this system he does not say how many booksellers used it.

staff in those days tended to spend a lifetime with one company and therefore many of them had encyclopaedic knowledge of the trade, but as the number of new titles increased and there was a bigger turn over of staff who worked shorter hours the expertise of the efficient book seller gradually became eroded and the book buyer, faced with indifferent service, blamed the publishers. The publishers responded by calling for better staff training to which the book sellers agreed on condition that they received better discounts from the publishers so that they could afford it.<sup>31</sup> In 1964, after a great deal of discussion among influential groups in the book trade, such as the Publishers Association (PA) and the Booksellers Association (BA),<sup>32</sup> the Charter Bookselling Group of the Booksellers Association was formed with a committee, which included publishers, appointed and 'almost immediately it became preoccupied with screwing better terms out of publishers.'<sup>33</sup> The committee laid down standards about all aspects of a book shop, such as the size of the window frontage, floor space, training, stock control, and minimum stock etc. but the main purpose of the Charter Group was to get improved discounts from the publishers for their members.<sup>34</sup> Each member of the Charter group was required to complete an annual questionnaire which became the basis of an economic survey of book selling. Many contemporary book sellers automatically qualified as Charter Group members because:

The conditions, except over training, were not onerous, perhaps because a senior member of the BA hierarchy of the time had so small a shop that they couldn't be, without embarrassing him. And, where training was concerned, so many members failed to meet the commitments that, certainly up to 1981, they were seldom penalised.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Norrie, p198.

<sup>32</sup> These two trade associations had both been set up in 1895 in order to organise and monitor the book trade.

<sup>33</sup> Norrie, p199.

<sup>34</sup> Norrie devotes a chapter to the Charter Group, p198-211, in which he discusses the numbers and types of bookshops across the country and the problems associated with retailing in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>35</sup> Norrie, p199.

Peter Curwen, in his 1981 study of *The UK Publishing Industry*, estimated that there were thirty-six thousand outlets that sold books, over half of them being newsagents. 'Of the remainder 3,200 were members of the Booksellers Association, but many shops join the BA simply in order to obtain the right to sell, as against to exchange, book tokens.' He further reduces the number to fewer than one thousand 'real or stockholding book sellers' and out of this number he says: 'the Charter group comprised 340 businesses owning 400 shops',<sup>36</sup> which suggests that the Charter Group had limited appeal. Although the annual questionnaire provided interesting information about year on year sales and profits, etc, the Charter Group disbanded at the end of 1992 ('one of the final nails in the coffin was that only 20 people went along to the last AGM').<sup>37</sup> The growth in the number of bookshop chains and wholesalers has negated the need for the Charter Group because their immense buying power has more influence on their suppliers when negotiating terms.

### **Market Research**

In the 1990s, the trade statistics provided by the Charter group have been superseded by companies that have been set up specifically to provide market research data for the publishing trade. One is Peter Harland's Bookwatch, which produces a weekly publication called *Books in the Media*, only available by subscription to the book trade. Another is Claire Harrison's Book Marketing Ltd, which covers a much wider field. Book Marketing Ltd was originally, in 1988, the Book Marketing Council of the Publishers Association, and they produced a detailed report on book buying, borrowing and reading habits, for which PA members had to pay an additional fee. Following a review of PA subscriptions and what should be provided for them, the Book Marketing Council was closed down in 1990 and an independent company, Book Marketing Ltd (BML), was set up.<sup>38</sup> They are responsible for

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<sup>36</sup> Peter J Curwen, *The UK Publishing Industry*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981. p87.

<sup>37</sup> Alison Baverstock, *Are Books Different: Marketing in the Book Trade*, London: KoganPage, 1993. p79.

<sup>38</sup> Baverstock, p112.

the *Books and the Consumer* report which provides detailed continuous purchasing information via a panel of 7,000 households. Subscribing companies receive twice-yearly reports and have the opportunity to request specially tailored analyses, or private commissions, information consultancy, or other syndicated studies. BML also publish *Book Facts*, a yearbook providing a comprehensive collection of data on the book industry and *Book Marketing Updates*, which are quarterly newsletters giving the latest industry-relevant information, including digests of new and original research findings. They also publish ad hoc reports and catalogues on various sectors including the library market, multimedia, audiobooks and travel.<sup>39</sup> This represents a considerable advance on the limited information collected by the Charter Group because this type of detailed research enables publishing houses, bookshops and libraries, for example, to use their resources more effectively.

### **Wholesaling**

The distribution of books is a huge logistical problem for publishers and wholesalers. Not only do they have to have enormous warehouse space to store the increasing numbers of published books but they also have to have a swift and effective system of retrieval of individual titles and be prepared to despatch any number of books from a single title to a containerful anywhere in the world.

While the Charter Group addressed some of the problems associated with book selling such as minimum stock and improved discounts from publishers, it did not tackle the inefficient ordering and distribution system which continually frustrated the trade. Between the two World Wars the national wholesaler Simpkin Marshall had held stocks of all the important publishers' lists and had been able to supply most of the independent book shops with single-copy and small-value orders but the company lost their warehouse and all their stock of six million books during the bombing of London in 1941. Although a new wholesaling company

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<sup>39</sup> *Book Marketing Limited* 1999 information pack. Published by BML, London.

was set up using the same name by a consortium of publishers operating through the Economic Relations Committee of the Publishers Association, (the PACH system), it was never very successful and it was sold to Robert Maxwell in 1951. In 1955 the company finally went into voluntary liquidation.<sup>40</sup>

Curwen maintains that the PACH system 'effectively destroyed any possibility of re-establishing a national wholesaler along the lines of Simpkin Marshall'.<sup>41</sup> Giles Clark in his 1994 edition of *Inside Book Publishing* says that 'wholesaling is relatively weak in the UK and is concentrated on consumer books',<sup>42</sup> yet twenty-six wholesalers had stands at the 1994 London International Book Fair. Some of these hold vast stocks of merchandise and many of them are realising the potential of computerisation. For example, the world-wide exporting company Gardners, currently holds 160,000 titles in stock, which amounts to more than 4,000,000 books from 697 companies, both hardback and paperback, plus audiotapes and multimedia CD-ROMS. They can locate any of the 800,000 British books in print or those of German and American publishers. With computer controlled order processing and an automatic conveyor system operating in their Eastbourne warehouse, they can run a 'next day' delivery service to anywhere in the UK. However, they do add the proviso in their advertising blurb<sup>43</sup> that 'with over 100,000 titles currently in print at any time not listed on the commercially available bibliographic data bases it is not always possible to obtain the books requested'.<sup>44</sup> In the event of the computer system crashing, and for the book sellers who do not wish to subscribe to the computerised system, printed catalogues listing all the different categories are supplied annually to all bookseller customers with weekly updates on special offers.

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<sup>40</sup> John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, London: Routledge, 1988. p217.

<sup>41</sup> Curwen, p72.

<sup>42</sup> Giles Clark, *Inside Book Publishing*, 2nd ed., London: Blueprint, 1994. p134.

<sup>43</sup> Gardners Books catalogues and information pack.

<sup>44</sup> This can happen quite frequently, says a Gardners spokesman, especially with special orders because data bases are not always kept up to date.

Yet, from the independent bookseller's point of view, some things have not changed. In 1962 the discount was 33.5 per cent for most general books including fiction; 25 per cent for most technical and educational books; and 16 per cent for more specialised books including special orders.<sup>45</sup> In 1999 the discount for general books is 35 per cent; 25 per cent for technical books; and 17.5 per cent for school text books. However, the large chains such as Waterstones/ Dillons and Ottakars receive considerably better terms than these. As a result most independent bookshops deal with wholesalers like Gardners who, depending on turnover, offer about 3% better terms than dealing with publishers direct.<sup>46</sup> But for the booksellers, the subscription for the wholesaler services and the attendant computerised systems comes as an extra overhead which has to be justified through additional sales even though books are accepted on a sale or return basis and returned for full credit regardless of their condition.

The trade would not have been able to track their book sales so effectively and provide the research data so easily without the introduction of the International Standard Book Numbering (ISBN) system which was introduced because computers recognise numbers rather than words. Librarians had been dealing with the Dewey decimal system<sup>47</sup> of library cataloguing for many years (originally devised in 1876) and record companies only dealt in letters and numbers, so it was common sense that the book trade followed suit. Each book is allocated a number, or two if it is published in hardback and paperback simultaneously, because within each set of digits there are some that denote the publisher, the language of origin, and the unique identifier of each book or edition. In the mid-1980s the ISBN was

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<sup>45</sup> Curwen, p42.

<sup>46</sup> Kevin Quinn, Quinn's Bookshop, Market Harborough, Leics. Personal email, 5 March 1999.

<sup>47</sup> The DDC uses decimal fractions to denote the ten main classes from 0 Generalities to 9 Geography, History, and auxiliary disciplines. Decimal fractions can be expanded infinitely to accommodate new subjects.



converted into the European Article Numbering (EAN) bar code which is located on the back cover of books.<sup>48</sup>

### **Book Fairs**

Book Fairs provide an ideal setting for publishers to carry out their own market research amongst booksellers and fellow publishers and it is also an opportunity for them to meet new contacts as well as to see existing customers and to sort out any problems relating to current deals. The Book Fair 'season' starts in late March of each year with the London International Book Fair and ends with the largest one in Frankfurt in early October. In between Fairs are held in Bologna, Warsaw, Beijing, Moscow, Jerusalem, Prague, Leipzig, Sofia, Budapest, Tehran and Belgrade. Added to these are the American Booksellers Association (ABA) Convention held in different American locations each year in June and the Spanish Liber Exhibition, held in either Barcelona or Madrid.<sup>49</sup> All these Fairs are basically about selling rights. Each Fair has its own specialities, such as the Bologna Fair for children's and educational books, and the Warsaw Fair for high level scientific, technical and medical titles, but it is at the Frankfurt Book Fair in particular where all the fiction publishers collect because it covers all countries and all levels of publication.

Piracy is one of the major problems facing the publishing trade and it was discussed at the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair. Forty per cent of the international book market is thought to be going to illegal traders. While academic and educational books are particularly targeted mass-market paperbacks are also being copied. The Top 10 books featured on either *The New York Times* or *Sunday Times* can be found on Bombay street stalls at a fraction of the

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<sup>48</sup> Clark, p136. The price is printed on the back of books (alongside the bar code) which Schmoller, in 1974, considered a problem 'because once a price is printed on the cover of a paperback it cannot be increased' (p306). Modern technology has solved the problem - sticky labels to cover the old price and show the new one!

<sup>49</sup> Lynette Owen, *Selling Rights: A Publisher's Guide to Success*, London: Blueprint, 1991. p53.

price of the published edition.<sup>50</sup> According to Ian Taylor, the international director of the PA, the greatest problem is in the Middle and Far East, where the Berne Convention, which requires a minimum level of copyright protection, is flouted and he specified Turkey, India and Korea as being the worst culprits. It is a problem that is 'deteriorating, not improving'.<sup>51</sup>

The selling of rights, the more usual business of book fairs, is a skilled occupation which calls for a detailed knowledge of all aspects of the book trade and a sharp financial mind able to negotiate watertight contracts often under pressure. There are currently eighteen different categories of rights<sup>52</sup> and part of this expansion in their number is because paperback rights are not now automatically granted to the original hardback publisher and therefore have to be bid for even though the hardback and paperback publishers are part of the same publishing group.<sup>53</sup> This double bid within the same publishing group is known as vertical publishing and if the author is a major mass-market author the two copies are often published simultaneously thereby offering opportunities for joint publicity campaigns which makes better use of promotion funds. Vertical publishing can also be international due to the multinationality of the publishing conglomerates, thus the same edition of a book can be marketed, for example, on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>54</sup> Ian Chapman, writing in 1996, believes that 'verticalization' is the way forward and that 'this is a particularly effective and appropriate way to publish mass-market fiction'.<sup>55</sup>

### **Traditional Market Agreement**

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<sup>50</sup> Simon Littlewood, international director of Random House, quoted in *The Times*, 14 October 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Ian Taylor, quoted in *The Times*, 14 October 1999.

<sup>52</sup> For full details of these rights see Lynette Owen, p21-25.

<sup>53</sup> An example of this type of rights selling is looked at in the deals associated with *The Horse Whisperer* in Chapter 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Chapman, 'Paperback Publishing', *Publishing Now*, edited by Peter Owen, London: Peter Owen Publishers, revised edition 1996, first published 1993, p48-57.

<sup>55</sup> Chapman, p50.

The buying and selling of international rights in such a way has only been possible since the abolition of the Traditional Market Agreement in 1974. The Market Agreement was an arrangement whereby UK and US publishers had divided the English book market world between them. The old British Empire and the Commonwealth (plus Ireland and South Africa) had been considered an exclusive market for the British publisher although Canadian rights were sometimes attached to the American market if the book originated in the US. During the second World War British publishers had difficulties supplying their traditional overseas markets, especially those which had become temporarily enemy territory, so the American publishers moved into the Empire market, especially Australasia where the trade took the view that if Britain could not supply what they wanted they would buy the American versions, which, because they had no economic regulations, were more attractively bound and jacketed. Following the war, negotiations between the Publishers Association and the US resulted in the British Market Agreement which entitled the British to sell rights in what had been the British Empire and Australia. However the Australians, who objected to English editions of books destined for their country being stamped 'colonial' negotiated to buy American rights direct, and when the US Department of Justice indicted American publishers on a charge of conspiring to carve up world markets against the interests of free competition, the Agreement was effectively invalidated. The Market Agreement was dropped and instead individual companies agreed the division of exclusive rights on a book by book basis, provided this reflected market strengths and broke no patterns. Thus British publishers had to fight harder to retain their export markets which led to many of them forming subsidiary companies in the US and Australia to originate titles and to buy and sell rights independently of their UK directors.<sup>56</sup>

The collapse of the Market Agreement did not initially lead to greater involvement in the export market in America because the size of their own home market made such an

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<sup>56</sup> Curwen, p75-76, and Norrie, p170-171.

expansion largely unnecessary, and as the demise of the Market Agreement followed the 1974 recession American publishers were unwilling to buy British books because of the unfavourable financial exchange rates. By 1979, as the world-wide recession deepened, many British publishers who had set up subsidiary companies in America had to withdraw because of the high rate of inflation in Britain compared to America; the value of the pound compared to the dollar made such arrangements too costly to maintain.<sup>57</sup> Now, in the 1990s, because so many of the publishing houses belong to vast media conglomerates that straddle the Atlantic the vagaries of the financial markets are no longer such a constraint on their trade.<sup>58</sup>

### **Book Clubs**

Another challenge for publishers and book sellers was the increase in the number of book clubs in the 1960s. W H Smith had recognised the potential growth of public libraries and had closed their commercial library branches in 1961. They decided to concentrate on the newly expanding area of mass market paperbacks and, in 1966, joined forces with the American publisher Doubleday and formed Book Club Associates, which became the biggest book club in Britain by the mid-1970s. Their success followed the decision of the Publishers Association to amend the regulation that banned the publication of special editions of books until the original had been on the market for one year. In February 1968 an agreement was reached to allow simultaneous publication of new books in original and book club editions with discounts of 35 per cent for fiction and 25 per cent for non-fiction<sup>59</sup> which, Curwen fails to point out, made nonsense of the Net Book Agreement which at that time prohibited booksellers from selling books below the publishers' marked price.

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<sup>57</sup> Curwen, p77.

<sup>58</sup> For a more detailed account of 'Same language territorial rights' see Lynette Owen, Chapter 9, p75-99.

<sup>59</sup> Curwen, p84.

Book Club Associates remains the largest book club operation in Britain but there are many others such as: Readers Union (acquired in 1990 by *Reader's Digest*); Books for Children (owned by Time-Life); Red House (books mostly for children but some for parents); Scholastic (books for children, operated by schools), and the Folio Society (which offers specially bound editions of the classics). It was the custom for adult book clubs to offer only hardback editions but in 1990 two paperback book clubs were established: Quality Paperbacks Direct by BCA and The Softback Preview by Time-Life.<sup>60</sup>

It had been suggested that the proliferation of book clubs would jeopardise the business of book shops but, according to Curwen in 1981, it would appear that book shops actually benefited because the heavy advertising of the book clubs encouraged the club members to acquire the reading habit and move beyond the books offered by the club. The book clubs buy in bulk thus enabling the publisher to increase their print run but the discount demanded by the clubs leaves minimal amounts to be paid in royalties to the authors.<sup>61</sup> If a book club features an author, the resultant increase in sales through conventional book shops can make up for the derisory book club royalties. Book clubs continue to thrive, and World Books, part of Book Club Associates which has a membership of more than 1,500,000, has set up book shops in London, Bromley, Bristol and Birmingham. Here club members can browse through the same range of books as those found in any High Street book shop, but selling at 25 per cent less, and without the bother of filling in the order form, which is the normal way of ordering from a book club.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Lynette Owen, p102.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Legat, *An Author's Guide to Publishing*, London: Robert Hale, 1992. (First published 1982). p36.

<sup>62</sup> Giles Gordon, *The Times*, 17 December 1994.

Janice Radway, in her 1997 American book about the history of the Book-of-the-Month Club<sup>63</sup> and the Literary Guild offers interesting insights into how and why books are chosen for their main selection and for their alternatives. The main selection has to appeal to a very large audience whereas the alternative list can be books with limited interest and these are often classed as 'literary'.<sup>64</sup> The editors, she says, prefer to offer literary books but they have to include obviously commercial books with little or no literary merit because 'the organisation [is] a profit-minded business'<sup>65</sup> and the job of the editors is to balance the choice each month between the commercial and the literary. This fine balance, or 'attention to the bottom line', she notes,<sup>66</sup> became a greater problem when Time-Life Incorporated, the corporate owners of the BOMC, wanted to become more involved in directing business at the club although, said one of the editors, 'They don't understand the book business.'<sup>67</sup> This dilemma is one that publishing houses are facing more and more frequently as they are bought up by conglomerates with little knowledge of how the book publishing trade functions.

Not all towns or villages have shops or other commercial outlets that sell books, so the book club is often the only option available to a reader. However, since September 1996 a new type of book club, Oprah's Book Club, has established itself. Although termed a 'book club' it is in reality a form of celebrity marketing. Once a month the television chat show hostess Oprah Winfrey chooses a book to discuss with her studio audience and with an estimated

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<sup>63</sup> Janice A Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*, Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1997.

<sup>64</sup> One of the editors has an intriguing way of classifying the club's fiction: 'commercial', 'serious' and 'autistic'. The first two are conventional classifications but the third is perhaps unique to the BOMC: 'Autistic fiction - fiction written autistically from a writer's individual sense of truth...gibberish when done badly, but literature when it works.' Radway, p61. Unfortunately no explicit examples are given.

<sup>65</sup> Radway, p59.

<sup>66</sup> Radway, p46.

<sup>67</sup> Radway, p49.

viewing audience of 30,000,000<sup>68</sup> she is able to boost the sales of the book she recommends to the extent that it can become the number one on the American best seller lists. The first book she endorsed, *The Deep End of the Ocean* by Jacquelyn Mitchard, increased its print run from 100,000 to 750,000<sup>69</sup> and when she chose the 1977 book *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison, it had to be reprinted eleven times. Publishers keen to see their novels hyped in this way inundate Winfrey's office but she will only recommend books that she herself has read and liked. Thus, her programme is bringing books that would not normally receive such attention to the notice of her viewers. But the real value of her programme is that she is encouraging the idea of reading as a pleasurable activity.

The conventional way of bringing attention to a particular book is through a review in the national press but this format too is changing. John Sutherland, speaking at a Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship Conference,<sup>70</sup> said that readers do not want fair and judicious reviews, they want to be entertained and so they prefer 'the hatchet jobs' and editors play up to this because they want to sell their newspapers and magazines. 'The function of the review', said Blake Morrison, 'is entertainment'.<sup>71</sup> But Elaine Showalter, speaking at the same Conference, praised the British book reviewing scene and the fact that books are serialised in newspapers which is not done in America. 'Reviewing' is seen as 'customer assistance' she said, which means telling readers what they would like to read. This suggests that the readers of the two nations have a fundamentally different approach to their personal selection of books and that there appears to be a closer relationship between book and newspaper publishers in Britain than there is in America. However, book reviews

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<sup>68</sup> Lisa Jardine, *The Times*, 25 April 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Tony Allen-Mills, *The Sunday Times*, 2 February 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship II Conference, University of Warwick, 3-4 November 1995.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

in the national press are perhaps themselves being superseded by the publicity generated by the multifarious book prizes which is a contemporary way of matching reader to author.

### **Net Book Agreement**

Within the British book trade throughout the nineteenth century free trade had been the rule. In 1851 publishers had tried to prevent booksellers from pursuing the practice of underselling, whereby big firms offered sufficiently large discounts to drive smaller competitors out of business, but this failed. However, towards the end of the decade, the book trade and literary professions united and the Society of Authors was founded by the novelist Walter Besant in the early 1880s, followed by the Booksellers Association and the Publishers Association in 1896. In 1896 between them they set up the Net Book Agreement (NBA), an agreement that prohibited a bookseller, under the threat of a trade boycott, from selling a book at less than the publishers' marked price for the first six months following publication. Its aim was to protect the smaller business from the larger one, which by virtue of its size, could, in a free market, offer large discounts to potential customers. The basic idea was a good one: by putting the same price on the same edition of each book in every bookshop all booksellers had an equal opportunity for a book sale. But it was too inflexible. It did not allow individual booksellers to assess their own market and charge prices their particular customers could afford.

Therefore, in March 1997, after years of argument and counter argument the NBA was finally dispensed with and it became illegal to fix the retail price of books after John Bridgeman, the Director-General of Fair Trading argued in the Restrictive Practices Court that it was against the public interest.<sup>72</sup> In effect, the Agreement had been ignored since 1995 but there were still those who lamented its passing. Auberon Waugh was quoted as saying:

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<sup>72</sup> Michael Horsnell, *The Times*, 14 March 1997.



What an extraordinary interpretation of the 'public interest' to suppose that anything that results in the disappearance of serious booksellers is to anybody's advantage. We can see from the example of the United States, where there's never been a net book agreement, that serious publishing - outside the strictly academic - is almost non-existent. The reading habit has been lost. Nothing but trash prevails.<sup>73</sup>

In the 1960s this Agreement managed to survive the general abolition of retail price maintenance, the main purpose of which was to help small shopkeepers and at that time the publishers successfully argued in the Restrictive Practices Court that the small independent book shops still needed its protection. But, in the 1980s and early 1990s, the agreement was being attacked as a barrier to free trade by politicians, the press and by many of those in the publishing trade itself. The book selling chain, Dillons, led by Terry Maher, tried to defy it and in 1991 the publisher Reed withdrew from it. In 1994 the publisher Hodder Headline broke away and caused controversy by selling three heavily discounted books in Asda supermarkets. These were three new novels by John le Carré, Stephen King and Rosamunde Pilcher, and Hodder claimed that they had increased sales of these authors by 78 per cent.<sup>74</sup> In 1995 HarperCollins, Random House and Penguin Books followed suit and withdrew from the Agreement. Two years later the Publishers' Association decided to abolish it, and in that year, 1997, just under two-fifths of books bought by consumers were discounted, though this figure varied within source. A third of books bought retail, compared to well-over half of those bought from non-retail sources, were bought for a price less than that printed on the book.<sup>75</sup>

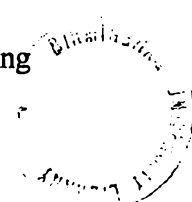
Thus, in the forty-year period being assessed, the restrictive practices of the NBA have been swept aside and replaced by the book trade's freedom to set their own prices on particular books in an effort to entice customers to buy them. Although publishers do retain some price

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> 'A New Chapter', special NBA supplement, *The Times*, 5 October 1995.

<sup>75</sup> Book Marketing Limited, *Books and the Consumer*, Report for Non-Subscribing Companies - Based on 1997 Data, July 1998.



controls they are much more flexible recognising that if books are expensive the customers will not buy them which, in the profit orientated business world of the 1990s, will lead to a decrease in profits, shareholders will not be paid their expected dividends, and jobs will be lost.

Terry Maher devotes a chapter in his book, *Against My Better Judgement*,<sup>76</sup> to the problems associated with the abolition of the NBA. His campaign, which he sets out in great detail, started in the early part of 1988 at which time 'most journalists, in common with their readers, had not realised that book prices were controlled.'<sup>77</sup> But despite many setbacks he and his team (Richard Holme, Roger Liddle, Frank Brazier, Julian Rivers, Jill Copping)<sup>78</sup> were finally able to persuade a sufficient number of publishers of the advantages of abrogating the NBA. In theory his campaign should not have been necessary because the European Commission had ruled on 12 December 1989 that the NBA was in breach of the Treaty of Rome, therefore any contravention of NBA rules was not breaking the law. But the PA appealed against this ruling and applied to the courts for an injunction thereby stopping Dillons' plan to sell the six titles on the 1990 Booker Prize list at 25 per cent below their published price. Rivers calculated, however, 'that the overall media coverage was equivalent to an advertising spend of several million pounds' and in the two days that the books had been discounted before the injunction was applied,

around seven times as many of the discounted titles were sold than would have been the case without the promotion, and ...more than 50% of those buying a promoted title also purchased on average more than two other books'<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Terry Maher, *Against My Better Judgement: Adventures in the City and in the Book Trade*, London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1994. p113-165.

<sup>77</sup> Maher, p115.

<sup>78</sup> Maher, p116.

<sup>79</sup> Maher, p145.

which supported the idea that discounting book prices attracted customers into book shops and encouraged further sales. Discounting book prices has also opened up the book market to new participants such as supermarkets, although with only limited space available they tend to limit their stock to national bestsellers.<sup>80</sup>

Maher outlined another anomaly of the NBA. In 1992 one of the clearing banks wanted to offer new young customers vouchers for Dillons if they opened an account but the restrictions of the NBA would not allow this, thus an opportunity to get youngsters into book shops and potentially into the book buying habit was lost. Likewise these restrictions also prevented book shops offering loyalty cards to their customers as other retailers were doing.<sup>81</sup>

One of the arguments in the 1960s for keeping the NBA was that without it libraries would force higher discounts out of book sellers or transfer their custom to specialised library suppliers, thus driving stockholding book sellers out of business.<sup>82</sup> But, Curwen points out, 'a large part of a book shop's library trade is barely worth the effort'<sup>83</sup> because a licensed library is entitled to claim a 10 per cent discount from the supplier under NBA rules, yet the book seller can only claim a 17.5 per cent discount from his supplier, therefore unless the library is putting in a bulk order it is not worth the effort. The 1997 Public Libraries Review *Reading the Future* saw the abandonment of the NBA as an opportunity for public libraries to save money because they were now free to negotiate discounts with new suppliers such as wholesalers who offer bigger discounts - up to 40 per cent on bestsellers. With these new

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<sup>80</sup> Personal letter from Sarah Willcox, Book Trading Manager, Thomas Cork SML, (wholesaler to the grocery trade), 20 March 1995.

<sup>81</sup> Maher, p157.

<sup>82</sup> Curwen, p44.

<sup>83</sup> Curwen, p99.

freedoms libraries can buy their books from one supplier and have them jacketed, tagged and catalogued by another.<sup>84</sup>

### **Commercial Changes**

An example of how the publishing industry has changed from what Frederic Warburg referred to as 'a business for gentlemen' to a market led commercial enterprise is the confidential management report: *The UK Book Industry: Unlocking the Supply Chain's Hidden Prize*, produced by KPMG, in association with the DTI, the Publishers Association, and the Booksellers Association, on the 16 February 1998. The fact that KPMG,<sup>85</sup> a financial services company, is involved with publishing at all is clearly indicative of the new path publishing is following since their Information, Communication and Entertainment (ICE) sector that produced this report, covers broadcasting, advertising, computing and internet, and telecoms, as well as publishing. This shows that publishing has now become subsumed within big media conglomerates and that financial management firms are needed to control all the different facets of them and if publishing is to survive it needs to be financially viable.

The report explains how the current book industry is not cost effective because there is too high a level of labour intensive queries, limited use of shared sales and stock data for marketing and planning, fragmented supply chain planning processes and distribution operations, limited exploitation of economies of scale, and the handling of returns are complex and high cost. The report argues that more investment in Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS)<sup>86</sup> would provide opportunities for better planning and thereby increase the benefits

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<sup>84</sup> *Reading the Future*, Public Libraries Review, Department of National Heritage, February 1997. p25. A Heritage spokesman said that there is only anecdotal evidence suggesting that local authorities have benefited from the demise of the NBA, particularly the bigger ones, but not to any great degree.

<sup>85</sup> KPMG information pack.

<sup>86</sup> This same point was argued by Simon Westcott, the Unwin Travelling Scholar 1991, in

to both publishers and retailers. By closer matching of the supply to the actual demand there could be a reduction in initial print runs thus reducing stock wastage and the better forecasting would lessen the losses due to stock being returned which, according to the report, cost the UK book industry around £100,000,000. An example of how this cutting of inventory costs is being put into practice was outlined in an interview with Michael Lynton in 1998 (at that time chairman of Penguin Books), when he said that some titles in Penguin's 25,000 strong back list (their core group of long life titles) sell only 300 to 500 copies a year. This made them difficult and expensive to store, but with the use of a new machine, copies of one of these infrequently ordered books could be printed in the warehouse from hard disc, and although they might be slightly distinguishable from conventionally produced copies, they would look like proper books.<sup>87</sup>

Many of these ideas were outlined by Richard Charkin, a publisher with wide experience of different aspects of the trade, in an essay in *Publishing Now* in 1996, as a way of revitalising a flagging publishing trade.<sup>88</sup> One of his suggestions to the trade: 'to embrace technology so that all authors are linked electronically to their publisher', a somewhat closer technological co-operation than that envisaged in the KPMG report, has been taken up by at least one publisher. A publisher with Maskew Miller Longman International recently coached an author through a whole book-writing exercise via email. The writer lives in Cambridge, England, and was writing a revision of a fast-track title for the editor in South Africa. The writer emailed all the chapters to Africa as attachments because the cost to courier each chapter as he wrote them would have been prohibitive. In this way they produced a 240 page

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'What's Hot, What's Not', A Report on Electronic Book Sales Data Collection Systems in the US, for The Sir Stanley Unwin Foundation.

<sup>87</sup> Raymond Snoddy, 'The Media Interview', *The Times*, 22 May 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Charkin, 'Publishing Now', in Peter Owen, ed., *Publishing Now*, London: Peter Owen, revised edition, 1996. p12-13.

agriculture book almost from scratch in four months, and the end result has been well received.<sup>89</sup>

Although KPMG were stressing EPOS as the answer to a lot of publishing's retail business problems it would appear that Internet book shopping has become an increasingly familiar way to 'embrace technology'. W H Smith's, for example, established their Internet book shop in 1993 with a database of nearly 1,500,000 books. This number is reputed to be all the English-language books in print and by 1999 they were receiving 35,000 visitors per week. Amazon.com at their UK site has the same number of books available plus 300,000 US titles, while at their German site they have 900,000 books on offer as well as the same number of US titles. These are small figures, however, compared to those at their US base; it has 4,700,000 titles.<sup>90</sup> 'It has been forecast that by 2003 Amazon.co.uk will have a turnover of £360m, which would match the current turnover of Waterstones/Dillons with its 187 outlets.'<sup>91</sup> The cost of postage has to be taken into account when ordering from Web-based book shops but since many of these sites offer best sellers at half price and nearly all other books at a reduced price the overall price is often cheaper than that of High Street book shops. Although postage rates are higher for a book ordered from the US site this is often compensated for by the cheaper US book prices. A report by Verdict Research says that online book sales will be valued at £430,000,000 or 17 per cent of the market by 2004, but only £73,000,000 worth will be new business. The rest will be poached from traditional booksellers.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Niccòla Perez, Publisher, Maskew Miller Longman International. Personal email 16 March 1999.

<sup>90</sup> Noam Friedlander, 'A novel idea', *inTOUCH* (Cable and Wireless magazine), November 1999. p12.

<sup>91</sup> *Book Retailing in Britain*, Bookseller Publications, London: Whitaker Business Publishing, 1999. p16.

<sup>92</sup> *The Times*, 10 December 1999.

Mainstream book publishers have also begun to exploit Web-based communication for closer co-operation between consumers, book shops, wholesalers, authors, investors, employees, and prospective employees after noting the phenomenal growth in Internet book selling.<sup>93</sup> For the consumers, using a Web-site allows them to access and search multiple specialised databases and archives and then order any book found. There are also facilities to recommend books, meet authors online, meet other readers in a virtual book group, and to feed back opinions and suggestions. A Website can make ordering easier for book shops and wholesalers as well as providing them with the means for dealing with their accounts electronically. (In May 1999 Waterstones wrote to 200 of its major suppliers to say that 'it would require all invoices to be submitted electronically by January 2000. Publishers that did not meet this request would be charged 13p per invoice by Waterstones'.)<sup>94</sup> A Website is also an ideal medium for communicating special offers, promotion plans and for distributing sample chapters, and, as the Maskew Miller Longman author found, it can provide key inhouse contacts, guides to the publishing process and submitting manuscripts, and then, if needed, supply him with sample contracts and sales and royalty information. Investors can find information on share prices, company reports, company accounts and biographies of key executives. For the employees and prospective employees, all the details relating to the company's publishing and marketing plans and how they will affect them are available if, of course, the Website is well maintained.<sup>95</sup> However, it has to be borne in mind that a company Website is an open window into that company so it is hardly likely to provide information that is damaging to itself.

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<sup>93</sup> As an example of how fast technology is changing: to get 50 million listeners it took radio 37 years, to get 50 million viewers took TV 15 years, and to get 50 million Web users took 3 years. *The Times*, 18 December 1999.

<sup>94</sup> *Book Retailing in Britain*, 1999, p17.

<sup>95</sup> Tom Davy, Publishers in cyberspace', *The Bookseller*, 5 March 1999. The Penguin Website is regularly updated, but as a non-employee it is difficult to judge the quality of the information.

If Britain eventually joins the European Monetary Union (EMU), the euro will introduce yet more changes in accounting, invoicing systems, pricing policies, exchange rate risk, and staff training. According to the 1999 edition of *Book Retailing in Britain* 'the European Booksellers Federation has reported that the estimated costs of this alone will amount to between 1% and 3% of turnover (the average net profitability of UK booksellers is currently estimated at 2.5%)'.<sup>96</sup> With the local price marked alongside that of the euro price on each book the consumer will be able to compare prices in each of the Union states and then shop accordingly, which will be particularly easy if the customer is using an Internet bookshop.

The long standing debate on whether Value Added Tax (VAT) should be levied on books will also have to be addressed by the European Commission. The present British government is committed to a zero rate of VAT for books but 'many observers expect eventual harmonisation throughout the Union, and the likelihood is that this will be at a reduced rather than a zero rate',<sup>97</sup> which is likely to lead to an increase in the price of books thereby inhibiting market growth. Since the Government provides the funds for school and public libraries to buy their books it would appear to be a detrimental step to put VAT on books because the extra funds the Government received from the VAT would be lost by the necessary increase in library funding to buy the same number of books.

Some of Charkin's other ideas for streamlining the industry, such as cutting salaries and numbers of senior management, have also been adopted, but his view of where the savings from his cuts could be deployed is not comparable to that shared by members of KPMG's ICE sector. They end their reflection on current trends and visions for the future with the words: 'In the long term ...who will be there? There is only one certainty. Advisors on strategy, corporate finance, technology and restructuring will continue to thrive.'<sup>98</sup> But

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<sup>96</sup> *Book Retailing in Britain*, 1999, p17.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* p18.

<sup>98</sup> Members of ICE practice, KPMG, 'Who will own whom in British publishing?', *Who*



Charkin is putting their suggestions into practice, cutting distribution costs by putting large reference works onto CD-ROM. He expects Macmillan Reference to be 50 per cent electronic within the next three years.<sup>99</sup>

Prior to the 1989 edition of the *Book Trade Yearbook*, the publisher, Whitaker and Sons Ltd, had attempted to summarise mergers taking place since the previous issue, but the information was often out of date by the time of publication. In the 1989 edition, they reproduced a table that had been printed in the *Guardian* on 24 July 1989, which was the newspaper's estimate of the structure of the book industry on that date. The table named the main companies as Collins UK (owned by News Corporation), Pearson, Macmillan, Reed International, Random Century UK (owned by Random House Inc., US), Bantam Inc., US (owned by Bertelsmann, W Germany), Unwin Hyman, Group de la Cite, France, Maxwell Communication Corps, George Weidenfeld Holdings and Paramount Communications, US. Beside each of these names were listed all the companies that came under the umbrella of that name, of which there were 120 overall, and the table was completed by the names of thirteen independent companies. Yet, according to the 1989 *Yearbook's* approximate industry figures, there were 400 members of the Publishers Association, 2000 'main' publishers contained in leading directories, 4000 publishers producing new books in 1988 and 14,500 publishers with books currently in print. They also noted that 20,000 publishers had been allocated ISBN numbers since 1967.

By contrast, on 12 June 1998 *The Bookseller* produced a supplement entitled *Who Owns Whom in British Book Publishing* in which they had drawn a time chart of British publishers, with the earliest company being Longman in 1724, and in 1998, as in 1989, there were only eleven main companies on the base line: Cassell, Egmont, Bertelsmann, Holtzbrinck, Reed

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*Owns Whom in British Book Publishing*, Bookseller Publications, London: J Whitaker and Sons, 1998. p16.

<sup>99</sup> Raymond Snoddy, *The Times*, 21 May 1999,

Elsevier, Thomson, HarperCollins, Little Brown, Pearson, Orion and Hodder Headline. The supplement adds a very long list of acquisitions in the UK publishing companies from 1990 to 1998 detailing the buyer, the asset, the seller, the month of the transaction, and, in some cases, the price paid. It is this information that indicates how the 1989 *Yearbook* produced its figure of 14,500 publishers. In 1990 there were thirty changes of ownership listed; in 1991, thirty-four; 1992, twenty-seven; 1993, thirty-three; 1994, twenty-six; 1995, forty-six; 1996, fifty-four; 1997, sixty-two, and for the first six months of 1998 there were twenty-eight. In 114 of these 340 acquisitions prices were given, one including debts, but mostly the figures quoted were in the millions of pounds, but there were two billion dollar transactions, plus two swaps and one part exchange.<sup>100</sup> All these changes of ownership in the last ten years show that the book publishing industry is very unstable yet the huge prices paid for these various publishing houses indicate that the media market sees a future in the book publishing trade.

The lowest level of changes within these nine years was in 1994, perhaps explained by the PA figures for that year which showed that the total book sales in the UK for 1994 rose by 6.1 per cent, with consumer sales up by 7.9 per cent and export sales rose by 12.9 per cent. But between the beginning of 1994 and the first half of 1995 the price of the wood-free paper used for most books increased by 85 per cent, and increased further in the second half of 1995,<sup>101</sup> which could help to explain why there was such an increase in the number of companies that changed hands that year. Publishers did attempt to use cheaper paper but

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<sup>100</sup> *Who Owns Whom in British Book Publishing*, Bookseller Publications, 1998. This supplement was issued free with the 12 June 1998 issue of *The Bookseller* but when Bookseller Publications was approached in 1999 for a copy of this supplement a charge of £55 was quoted. (One of the research difficulties encountered when looking for magazine and newspaper supplements was that many had been misappropriated.)

<sup>101</sup> Phillippa Smith, ed., *UK Publishing: 1996 Market Review*, 6th ed., Middlesex: Key Note Ltd, 1996. p64.

printers found it difficult to work with and the finished book was unattractive which would have meant limited sales.

In 1994 the American *Publishers Weekly*<sup>102</sup> also looked at the rise of the conglomerates and produced 'a capsule history of nine major publishing groups since 1960'. They were: Bantam Doubleday Dell, HarperCollins, Holt Rinehart & Winston, Morrow/Avon, Penguin USA/NAL/Dutton, Putnam, Random House, Simon & Schuster and Time Warner. The number of acquisitions listed varies between four and nine for each of those nine groups. Having noted the large number of transactions listed in the 1998 *The Bookseller* supplement, it is understandable that Gary Ink of Cahners Publishing insists that the 1994 *Publishers Weekly* information is outdated<sup>103</sup> because between 1994 and 1998 the number of changes of ownership almost doubled.

### **Public Lending Right**

Not all changes in the book publishing trade solely favour the publisher. After almost thirty years of campaigning, initially by the novelist John Brophy in 1951, then endorsed by the Society of Authors and later reinforced by the Writers' Action Group, the Public Lending Right (PLR) was set up by Act of Parliament in 1979 to give authors and illustrators of published books the right to receive payment from the government for the free lending out of their books by public libraries, thereby bringing Britain into line with Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Denmark and Sweden. The principles of the 1979 Act in Britain are that authors have to register their books with the PLR Registrar who then makes an annual payment to them on the basis of how often their books are borrowed from a sample number of public lending libraries. These sample libraries consist of thirteen English county libraries, five metropolitan district, four Greater London, three from Scotland, three from

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<sup>102</sup> *Publishers Weekly*, 14 March 1994.

<sup>103</sup> Gary Ink, personal fax 4 March 1999.

Wales and two from Northern Ireland. To minimise any unfairness in variations of borrowing patterns the sample is rotated every year and a third of the libraries are replaced with new ones. Some of the libraries are multi-sited but as issues data is normally held on the central library's computer there is not considered to be any significant extra work for the library's staff. However, all libraries are reimbursed from the PLR fund, provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, for any costs incurred. The detailed rules defining eligibility criteria for authors and books and the selection of sample public libraries were originally incorporated into the PLR Scheme which received parliamentary approval in 1982. Since then there have been Amending Orders made in 1983, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1991, and 1997 to update the Scheme to cover all sorts of eventualities, such as trusteeship and renunciation.<sup>104</sup> Further amendments may follow because PLR payments are currently made to the estates of dead writers for a maximum of seventy years and there are suggestions that this period should be shortened. The PLR management team are also considering ways in which it may possibly benefit financially from the information it has in its unique data base.<sup>105</sup>

The advantages of the PLR are available to any author resident in the UK (excluding the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands) and Germany. Although fifteen countries operate PLR systems and a sixteenth, France, is shortly to set up its own following an EC Directive on the subject, it is only with Germany that Britain has a reciprocal agreement.<sup>106</sup> The usual criterion for eligibility is to be named as the author on the book's title page. If there are several contributors, editors, translators, illustrators or photographers involved, they are eligible to claim a share. Payments are made annually and based on the number of times an author's books are borrowed from public libraries. The sample libraries provide the PLR

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<sup>104</sup> *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1999*, London: A & C Black, 1999. p636.

<sup>105</sup> After I suggested it to them in a telephone conversation with PLR Stockton-on-Tees office, 13 April 1999.

<sup>106</sup> PLR Report 1999.

office with details of their issues and these figures are grossed up to provide a national estimate for each book. The total number of issues is then divided into the money made available by the Government after the PLR's running costs have been deducted. When the first payments were made in 1984 the rate per loan was less than 2p, (in 1993 it was 1.86p), but the current rate is 2.07p (rising to 2.18p in 2000) and the highest amount any author may receive is £6,000. In 1993-94 the minimum level of payment was set at £1 with 950 authors falling into that category, while 116 authors received the maximum from the fund of £4,750,000 supplied that year.<sup>107</sup> In February 1998, when the new minimum was set at £5, 12,012 authors received payments between £5 and £99 and ninety-three authors received the maximum from the fund of £4,921,000. However, 9,763 of the 27,275 registered authors received nothing that year.<sup>108</sup> In 1999 there was slightly less of a discrepancy with 11,352 of the 28,544 registered authors receiving nothing.<sup>109</sup>

For many authors the PLR payment comes as a welcome boost to their finances because the authors who receive these payments are not always those who appear on the 'best seller' or 'fast seller' lists<sup>110</sup> compiled each week for the book trade and published in the press. However, certain authors are frequently borrowed from the libraries and also sell well. (The libraries buy them because the authors are known to be frequently borrowed and because the libraries buy them the sales figures increase). Catherine Cookson and Dick Francis have appeared on the PLR's 'most borrowed authors' list since the PLR's inception and they have also appeared on all the 'best seller' lists. The January 1999 PLR report lists twelve of Catherine Cookson's titles among the twenty most borrowed fiction, eight of them taking the top eight places, the others interspersed with three by Danielle Steel, two by Dick Francis,

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<sup>107</sup> PLR Report 1993-94.

<sup>108</sup> PLR Report 1999.

<sup>109</sup> 320 less. PLR Report, January 2000.

<sup>110</sup> For the distinction between 'bestseller' and 'fastseller' see the reference to Escarpit's definitions in the Introduction, p1.

and one each by Maeve Binchy and Barbara Taylor Bradford. However, it would appear that children are even more conservative than adults in their reading habits because in their twenty most borrowed fiction list there are only three names, R L Stine, fifteen times, Roald Dahl, four times and one title by Jill Murphy.<sup>111</sup>

Although it only registers authors who are eligible for PLR payments, the PLR computer also records issues of books by dead authors. Thus they are able to provide an estimated total of the loans of the 'classic' authors, such as Shakespeare, Dickens and Austen, and popular authors, such as Dennis Wheatley, Louisa M Alcott, Daphne Du Maurier and Beatrix Potter. They also list the names of all the authors with estimated loans over 1,000,000, those with estimated loans over 500,000, and those with estimated loans over 300,000. In 1993/94 these were 6 per cent, 8 per cent, and 7 per cent respectively of the total number of loans.

Looking for patterns in the PLR lists it is interesting to note the correlation between the most borrowed non-fiction books lists and events happening in particular years. For example, books on members of the Royal family, biographies of people in the news, television programme tie-in books, etc. Perhaps the list in the January 1999 report has something of more significance because there are eight titles by Terry Deary, all of which are humorous, child-orientated history books, (the non-fiction list covers all books, it does not differentiate between children and adults), and two *Eyewitness Guides* on Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome, which possibly relates to the current shortage of school library books rather than to an upsurge in interest in history. This suggests that the level of Government spending on school libraries is not sufficient and that their campaign of providing computer equipment instead of books is perhaps out of step with what children want.

### **Bestseller Lists**

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<sup>111</sup> But these figures pre-date the arrival of A J Rowling's *Harry Potter*.

Another noticeable feature of the PLR lists is the difference between them and the bestseller lists published weekly in the broadsheet newspapers since 1974, when the growth of computerisation made the compilation feasible. With a growing number of publishing houses being incorporated into conglomerates, they have had to show that they are financially viable and producing 'best-selling' books is an effective way of proving it. The Americans are credited with inventing these lists, which were started regularly in *The Bookman* in 1895, although the US newspaper *Kansas Times and Star* is reputed to have been the first to use the phrase when it listed six books as the 'best sellers here ever last week' on 25 April 1889.<sup>112</sup> When the wholesaler Simpkin Marshall initially attempted to introduce the idea into the UK in 1931 it was criticised as being 'un-English', and after a campaign led by J B Priestley against the misuse of the term 'bestseller' in advertisements the idea was dropped.<sup>113</sup> The term 'bestseller' today is usually associated with novels, but in reality the books that have sold best are the Bible, *Quotations from the Works of Mao Tse-tung* and Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. There is, however, one novel in the top ten best selling books of all time and that is *Valley of the Dolls* by Jacqueline Susann, which is reputed to have sold approximately 30,000,000 copies.<sup>114</sup> These remarkable sales figures are attributed to the fact that she was one of the first authors to appear on numerous talk-shows on television and radio stations to promote her book in 1966, with the help of her husband/manager, Irving Mansfield, who was a former Hollywood publicist and television producer.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Russell Ash, *The Top Ten of Everything 1999*, London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 1998. p122.

<sup>113</sup> McAleer, p48.

<sup>114</sup> Ash, p123.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Whiteside, 'Onward and Upward with the Arts: The Blockbuster Complex-1', *New Yorker*, 29 September 1980, p72.

Since 14 April 1974, when the average price of a hardback novel was £2.75 and a paperback 40p, Peter Harland of Bookwatch<sup>116</sup> has been compiling an annual bestseller list from the weekly appearances in *The Sunday Times* bestseller list. The information for these lists came from retail sales recorded during the seven day period specified by contributing outlets which were balanced geographically, by size and by type.<sup>117</sup> When he started his research he classified the books as the top ten paperbacks, fiction and non-fiction in each category. In 1975 he changed the 'non-fiction' heading to 'general' and he kept these same headings until 1987, although, inexplicably, in 1979 he listed twelve fiction titles instead of the usual ten. Then in 1987 he reclassified the books into five categories: hardback non-fiction, hardback fiction, paperback non-fiction, paperback fiction and hardback manuals. Between April 1974 and 1990, when the average price of a hardback novel rose to £13.99 and a paperback £3.99, there are 132 authors listed from all the categories, of which eighty-four are only listed for a single book, although the actual book may appear twice, once as a hardback and once as a paperback. Among these are Arthur Hailey with *The Money Changers* in 1975 and 1977, Erich Segal with *Oliver's Story* in 1977 and 1978, Sidney Sheldon with *If Tomorrow Comes* in 1985 and 1986, Penelope Lively with *Moon Tiger* and Margaret Drabble with *The Radiant Way* in 1987 and 1988, Tom Wolfe with *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and Jilly Cooper with *Rivals*, with which she topped both lists in 1988 and 1989. Other fiction authors had a single hardback in two consecutive years: Nicholas Montserrat with *The Master Mariner* and Iris Murdoch with *The Sea, The Sea* in 1978 and 1979, and J G Ballard with *Empire of the Sun* in 1984 and 1985. A single author, Peter Benchley, featured three times with *Jaws*, as a hard back in 1974 and as a paperback in 1975 and 1976. George Lucas had his paperback *Star Wars* listed in 1977 and 1978. The only non-fiction author to appear twice with a single book was Clive James with the paperback version of *Unreliable Memoirs* in 1981 and 1982.

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<sup>116</sup> Top 10 lists provided by Peter Harland of Bookwatch.

<sup>117</sup> Currently the bestseller list in *The Sunday Times* is provided by Bookwatch from data supplied by BookTrack's TCM sample representing total sales of 6000 outlets including internet booksales.



In the seventeen years of this sample period the other forty-eight authors have various numbers of fiction titles listed in Harland's *Sunday Times* Top 10. Twenty-four of them have two titles each, eight have three, four have four, four have five, three have six, two have seven, Catherine Cookson has ten, Wilbur Smith has thirteen and Dick Francis has fifteen. Wilbur Smith actually features on the lists nineteen times with his books and Dick Francis eighteen times! (Wilbur Smith continues his impressive run of bestsellers. His 1999 novel *Monsoon* has broken all the records by becoming the biggest ever selling fiction hardback in one week. It sold 18,700 copies in the first week of publication.)<sup>118</sup> The last three authors have also featured on the PLR top 100 authors lists every year since they have been compiled. This shows a consistency between library book readers and book buyers, although there are some notable discrepancies because this comparative survey is only covering the top ten fiction authors for each year and the library lists cover the top 100 authors. For instance, in 1974 Desmond Bagley had a paperback in the top ten best selling list yet every year between 1983 and 1988 he was in the top 100 library list. Frederick Forsyth, Alistair Maclean, Len Deighton, Jack Higgins and Sidney Sheldon all feature in the library lists throughout the years 1983-90, as well as Jeffrey Archer, who had five titles in the top ten best selling lists featuring eleven times. Harold Robbins was on the library list for five different years within the survey period.

The only female author who featured prominently on both lists is Catherine Cookson. In the years 1983-90 her titles took between twenty-two and thirty-five places in the top 100 most borrowed library books. Behind her comes Barbara Taylor Bradford, with a hardback in the top ten in 1983 she appears on the library top 100 lists from 1984-90 with titles in the top ten lists from 1985-90. Danielle Steel, with a top ten paperback in 1982 and 1990 consistently appears in the library lists from 1986-90. Colleen McCullough, with a paperback in 1979

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<sup>118</sup> *The Times*, diary item, 15 April 1999.

and a hardback in 1982 in the top ten lists, appears on the library lists from 1983-87. Judith Krantz had one top ten paperback in 1984 and appears on the library lists from 1987-90 and Susan Howatch, whose top ten mention was a hardback in 1980, appears on the library list for seven out of the eight years covered by this survey. Maeve Binchy, Jackie Collins, Belva Plain and Agatha Christie all feature three times on the library lists. A striking feature about all these female authors is that they all write romances (except Agatha Christie) which suggests that if a female author wishes to write a bestseller or do well from the PLR then she must write romantic stories. However, it may also suggest that these are the authors that the public libraries are providing - is this because they can now get a bigger discount on bestsellers, or is really what the public library users want to read?

Looking at bestseller lists can be interesting from a sociological viewpoint because of all the background factors that cause one particular book to be popular enough to be listed at a particular time in history, but the lists do not really tell us anything about the quality of the books or about their readership since all they indicate is the number of sales of one book compared to another. Library lists should be more reliable as borrowing a book implies that it is to be read, but the sale of a book does not necessarily indicate that it is. Yet as more and more bestseller lists are constructed with differing titles at number one through to number ten there must be an element of manipulation or different interpretation of the sales information. This means that unless there is a central bank of computerised data fed by all book selling outlets book sales figures will continue to differ from source to source, but this is unlikely to happen because it would produce only one definitive list. A single list would be very unwelcome to the popular fiction publishing trade because the appearance of a book on a bestseller list, however constructed, becomes part of the publicity hype attached to any new book and therefore to be greatly prized. To the average reader the bestseller lists may only be a guide to their choice of reading but for the publishing houses, whose profitability depends on sales, these lists give them some indication that their publishing decisions were correct.

Alex Hamilton compiles a slightly different set of figures annually for the *Guardian*. Since 1987 he has traced the top 100 'fastsellers' (ie those that initially sell very well and then sales slump equally quickly). These are the paperbacks which have appeared for the first time in that year from British publishers, regardless of their hardcover provenance.<sup>119</sup> Thus a book on Hamilton's list might only ever appear once, whereas a 'bestseller', if the term is used in its true sense, could appear on a top ten or top 100 list some years after publication following a period of slow but steady sales. A current example of this is *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* by Louis de Bernières, which was first published in April 1994. By Christmas 1998 it had sold over 1,000,000 copies and was top of the 1998 bestseller list in *The Times*.<sup>120</sup> In spite of press reports that its success has been entirely due to 'word of mouth' recommendation and that it has not been through the 'hype machine',<sup>121</sup> Geoff Mulligan, writing in *The Bookseller*<sup>122</sup> argues that it did get promoted with posters, t-shirts, dumpbins, press and radio coverage, author tours, etc., plus favourable comments from other writers and articles in the press. But it did not get into the bestseller lists despite winning the Commonwealth Writers Prize and being short-listed for the *Sunday Express* prize, and getting a newly designed cover for the paperback edition. What finally brought it to the attention of the reading public was that in August 1997 it was chosen as Radio 4's 'Book at Bedtime' and the fifteen episodes, read by Robert Powell, attracted a nightly audience of 800,000. Since then the reading public has justified all the unnoticed hard work by the publicity department and made this book a genuine bestseller.

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<sup>119</sup> Alex Hamilton, *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 1999*, London: A & C Black, 1999. p271.

<sup>120</sup> *The Times*, 26 December 1998.

<sup>121</sup> Joanna Pitman, *The Times*, 15 November 1997. The term 'hype machine', in this instance, means immense publicity coverage.

<sup>122</sup> Geoff Mulligan, *The Bookseller*, 29 May 1998. p34.

Popular fiction publishing appears to delight in lists and classifications so it is not surprising that the wholesalers and libraries do so too. Gardners, the book wholesalers, classify their fiction lists under fifteen separate headings: Black and Ethnic, Crime and Thrillers, Erotica, Gay and Lesbian, General, Short Stories, Graphic Novels, Saga/Historical, Romantic, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, War, Westerns and Film and TV Tie-ins (although these are not all necessarily fiction). However, the public libraries classify their fiction lists under eleven headings and the order in which they are listed correlates with their popularity with the library book readers: Romance, Crime/Thriller, Modern Novel, Historical, War/Adventure, Classic, Science Fiction, Horror/Occult, Humour, Western, and Other.<sup>123</sup> Thus, despite the lower figures recorded on the top ten lists and the top 100 most borrowed authors lists, it is the romantic books written by the women which are the most popular overall, and all those thrillers and crime stories written by the men come second. But the PLR have produced another variation on this sort of listing. In January 1999 they listed the loans of registered adult fiction books by category and their percentage of all the books borrowed and they compared the percentages over the last decade. General Fiction came top of their list with 22.1 per cent in 1997/98, compared with 17.8 per cent in 1988/89. This was followed by Mystery and Detection 12.8 per cent (12.8 per cent), Light Romance 10.6 per cent (14.1 per cent), Historical 2.9 per cent (3.5 per cent), War 1.3 per cent (1.8 per cent), Science Fiction 0.8 per cent (0.8 per cent), Westerns 0.7 per cent (1.2 per cent), Horror 0.4 per cent (0.7 per cent), Humour 0.2 per cent (0.7 per cent) and Short Stories 0.2 per cent (0.5 per cent), which restores the balance in favour of the male authors. This in turn suggests perhaps that the romance-writing female authors are not registering with the PLR. However, there is an overall 1.9 per cent drop in adult fiction loans within that period. There is also a 4.6 per cent drop in adult non-fiction loans but an increase of 4.6 per cent in children's fiction and a 1.9 per cent increase in children's non-fiction.

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<sup>123</sup> John Sumsion and Deborah R Fossey, Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU), Department of Information and Library Studies, Loughborough University, 1992.

## Public Libraries

The 1999 PLR figures also tend to reflect the PLR figures of registered loans by category produced in 1993/4, except that there was a slight increase (0.8 per cent) in adult fiction loans, with a 3.5 per cent decrease in adult non-fiction, and a 1.6 per cent and 1.1 per cent increase in children's and non-fiction respectively. Throughout the last decade the public library service has become increasingly under-funded leading to many libraries having to close or to cut their opening hours. Thus they are often shut when many people want to use them. In the *Public Libraries Review* under the heading 'The Roles of Central and Local Government' it says:

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has a statutory responsibility under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to 'superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities ...' in England. Local library authorities are required under the same Act to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service. The Government determines each year the Standard Spending Assessment for each local authority, which includes provision for libraries in the Other Services Block grant. It is up to local authorities to decide how much of this to allocate to the library service.<sup>124</sup>

The last sentence of that quotation is the crucial one because it allows the Government to say that it is providing sufficient money for the public library service, which cost £639,000,000, of which £109,000,000 (17 per cent) was spent on books and other materials in the year to March 1995.<sup>125</sup> The 'other materials' were video tapes, music and audio cassettes, compact discs, and Internet services, all now part of the services provided by public libraries. This means even less money is being spent on books. However, there are proposals to highlight the importance of libraries and to encourage their use. For example, Launch Pad,<sup>126</sup> was set up in 1998 in order to develop commercial partnership projects and its aim is to introduce parents to library resources in three different settings: at leisure, as shoppers and in the workplace. 'Kick Off!' the leisure scheme organised at football grounds

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<sup>124</sup> *Reading the Future*, p6.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Hilary Macaskill, 'Libraries have lift-off', *The Bookseller*, 12 February 1999. p30.

or sports centres or similarly male-orientated places is aimed at men and boys, fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, big brothers and little brothers, to try and encourage them to read to each other. The significance of the venue was that one does not have to go to a library to read. Asda, the supermarket chain, supported 'The Big Read' initiative by providing reading corners in their stores, plus storytelling, events by performance poets and mobile libraries in their car parks. Ford at Dagenham also co-operated with LaunchPad. Here librarians and the employee development assistance programme (Edap) organised library displays, emphasised the benefits of reading as a 'stress buster', and offered advice on how to fit reading into a busy family schedule, with the joint support of the trade unions and management. However, these initiatives are wasted efforts if the libraries that the people are being encouraged to use, are not open. Perhaps all these initiatives should be sponsored by the publishing houses instead, with big discounts offered on their books as incentives, to encourage the reading habit.

The Arts Council of England's Literature Panel sponsors a number of projects in libraries with the avowed aim of providing a widespread appreciation of literature but the 1999/2000 subsidy of £47,500 is a very small percentage of their total budget of £1,65,000<sup>127</sup> and not all libraries are appreciative of offers of help, or so a journalist would have us believe.<sup>128</sup> In 1995 Devon County Library Services had their book-buying budget cut by £250,000. A local benefactor in Axminster wanted to give the library a gift of 200 volumes from the Everyman classics, with the only condition being that when the books were not out on loan they should be shelved in the Axminster library. The local librarians are reported as having rejected the gift, saying: 'two hundred titles of classic literature would not give a balanced stock'. They are also reported to have said that there was not enough shelf space for housing the classics, although some locals were quick to point out that there was enough space for 200 volumes

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<sup>127</sup> The Arts Council of England, *Literature Department Funding 1999/2000*.

<sup>128</sup> Bernard Levin, *The Times*, 28 March 1995.

of Mills and Boon.<sup>129</sup> However, the sequel to that event, not followed up by *The Times* correspondent, was that the County Librarian, who was responsible for the decision whether or not to accept the gift, did accept the gift, and the publishers of the books, with suitable publicity, gave Axminster library a stand for them. Unfortunately the design of the stand was unsuitable for a library because the titles of the books were not clearly visible, so, as a result, the books were rarely borrowed. Subsequently, the stand was removed and the books intermingled with the rest of the stock and since then the books have been frequently borrowed.<sup>130</sup> This suggests that readers like to see the titles of the books they are thinking of borrowing, or perhaps readers are more likely to read a classic if it is shelved alongside the non-classic books.<sup>131</sup> Research has shown that it is the covers of books that attract readers (though the name of the publisher is considered irrelevant) and over half the readers questioned for a National survey of Reading Habits said that they found the text on a book cover enough to decide whether to read it.<sup>132</sup> This survey also recorded that over half of the readers found it easier to find books in book shops than in libraries which suggests that our libraries are not as user-friendly as they ought to be.

In the 60s, 70s and 80s the erotic romance was not part of mainstream publishing, and thus not likely to be freely available in public libraries but in the early 1990s it gained respectability with several imprints being launched: Black Lace in 1993, Eros Plus and

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<sup>129</sup> Since the Bodleian Library in Oxford has 10,060 Mills and Boon titles (and 3,068 Silhouette titles) the Axminster collection appears very reasonable.

<sup>130</sup> Personal telephone conversation with the Axminster Librarian, 20 May 1999. (A sequel to this story, she said, was that a teacher in Scotland was offered the same gift but she refused it saying that the children found the classics, and their covers, boring and preferred the *Goosebump* series instead.)

<sup>131</sup> This is an improvement. Leavis said in 1932: 'A librarian who has made the experiment of putting 'good' fiction into his library will report that no one would take out *South Wind* or *The Garden Party*, whereas, if he were to put two hundred more copies of Edgar Wallace's detective stories on the shelves, they would all be gone the same day.' Q D Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1968. First published 1932. p5.

<sup>132</sup> National Survey of Reading Habits: Public Libraries & Waterstone's in Partnership, A.M.S. Marketing Services, Analysis by Alison Shakespeare, September 1999.

Liaison in 1995, for example, while Castle Communications introduced Prelude, a list of erotic audio classics in 1994. By 1997 there were seven publishers listed under the Erotic heading in the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*. This number grew to eleven in the 1999 edition. The publishers do admit to some censorship however within this genre 'but the limits seem to be set only at paedophilia and sex with animals'.<sup>133</sup> Other genres, such as black and ethnic writing are also quietly gaining a following, especially since the ethnic weekly newspaper *The Voice* set up a book club to promote black writers. Gay and lesbian fiction has come off the top shelves and mixed with general fiction.

But it is the heavily promoted books that continue to haunt the media, not always as subjects of reviews, and this is amply illustrated in the next six chapters where I look at the various ways bestsellers are created. It is the vast advances, the thousands paid for rights, and the share prices involved with conglomerate takeovers that make the news, and as more and more publishers' names appear on the Business pages rather than the Arts pages, it has to be accepted that it is the shareholders who ultimately now decide what is, and what is not, published. But have things ever been different?

From the end of the 16th century the attitudes of printers and booksellers changed, as did relations between authors and publishers. The great generations of humanist printers disappeared in the upheavals at the close of the century...Publisher-booksellers were no longer concerned to patronise the world of letters, but only to publish books with a guaranteed sale. The richest made their money on books with an assured market, reprints of old bestsellers...<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *The Bookseller*, 21 April 1995. p27.

<sup>134</sup> Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, quoted by Ken Worpole, *Reading by Numbers: Contemporary Publishing and Popular Fiction*, London: Comedia, 1984. p16.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Rise and Rise of the Literary Agent

The quote that closed the previous chapter could usefully be employed to introduce this one because the advent of the literary agent has also 'changed...relations between authors and publishers.' The position of the literary agent, like those in every other sphere of the leisure market, has become a permanent fixture. With the amalgamation of publishing houses into large media corporations there are fewer places for the agent to seek a deal and although it is said that it is not necessary to have an agent (Colin Dexter has never felt the need to employ one),<sup>1</sup> a publishing house will obviously look more favourably on a novel that has been approved by a trusted agent first. The decline in editing skills in publishing houses means that it is the agent who is deciding what the public will read since few publishers now read unsolicited manuscripts. Thus the power of the agent is increasingly pervasive in the field of book selection but the agent, at the end of the twentieth century, is still no further forward in solving the problem of author poverty, if indeed that is the role of the agent, than it was at the end of the nineteenth. In compiling the ideal agent Janine de Giovanni does not see relief of author poverty as a necessary requisite:

To be a good agent, one needs several characteristics; the killer instincts of a jaguar, the intuitive powers of Mystic Meg and the nurturing abilities of a Sicilian matriarch. You must be able to give good lunch, without any of this no-alcohol nonsense, and have a keen survival instinct. You must be patient enough to massage the egos of insecure writers, and able to allow yourself the occasional sycophancy towards publishers. You also need to have your finger on the pulse of the literary world, and know what will be the next trend. This means membership, and regular appearances, at the Cobden, Garrick and Groucho Clubs, and having a credit card flexible enough to chase down potential authors to the four corners of the world.<sup>2</sup>

However, if an agent, like the one described, is to work so assiduously on behalf of an author then it is to be presumed that for that particular author poverty is not an issue because no agent will want to work hard for 10 per cent of very little.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, 2 June 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Janine di Giovanni, *The Times*, 8 December 1997.

In the nineteenth century A P Watt's 1875 definition of an agency was somewhat less verbose but essentially said the same thing:

The work of the Literary Agency is to conduct all business arrangements of every kind for Authors; that is to say, to place manuscripts to the best advantage; to watch for openings; to sell Copyrights, either absolutely or for a limited period; to collect Royalties, and to receive other moneys due; to conduct Arbitrations; to transfer Literary Property; to value Literary Property; to obtain opinions of mss. etc.etc.<sup>3</sup>

So how have things changed?

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the long standing animosity between publishers and authors became a subject commented on by many of the prominent literati of that time. As the Society of Authors, for example, campaigned to have its voice heard there emerged out of this conflict a functionary with a definite mediatory role to play between the two opposing sides, the literary agent. The basic role of the agent was to look after the commercial interests of the authors they represented by exploiting the rights of the material they were employed to handle, and in return they received, on average, ten per cent commission on monies paid for that material. However the agent was not necessarily considered a welcome addition to the literary world as the depiction offered by William Heinemann in the *Athenaeum* in 1893 shows:

This is the age of the middleman. He is generally a parasite. He always flourishes. I have been forced to give him some little attention lately in my particular business. In it he calls himself the literary agent. May I explain his evolution?

*The Origin.* You become the literary agent by hiring an office; capital and special qualifications are unnecessary; but *suaviter in modo*<sup>4</sup> must be your policy, combined with a fair amount of self-assertion. You begin by touting among the most popular authors of the moment, and by being always at hand and glad of a job, you will soon be able to extract from them testimonials which, carefully edited, make up a seductive prospectus to send out broadcast. You must collect these testimonials with zest, just as the pill-doctor or the maker of belts electropathic. It does not matter how much you pester quiet people for them, as long as you get your circular together. 'You have made one author wealthy (*you*, not his work; oh no, not his work!)

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Hilary Rubinstein, 'A.P. Watt: The First Hundred Years', *The Bookseller*, 3 May 1975.

<sup>4</sup> '*Suaviter in modo fortiter in re*', 'gentle in manner, resolute in deed'.

who was poor before; another has found you invariably reliable; and a third has tried you two years ago, and has never been anywhere else since.'

*The Business.* You commence by taking in a weekly paper, in which you follow carefully every author who has hitherto been unsuccessful, who is just beginning to succeed, and who has found in some publisher, whose endeavours and efforts and work have at last helped to bring him into recognition. You must lose no time in dispatching your circular to this author, telling him that he has been shamefully neglected in the past, that you can double, treble, increase his income tenfold, if he will only allow you 10 per cent of this income for doing so....<sup>5</sup>

According to James Hepburn in his book *The Author's Empty Purse and the Rise of the Literary Agent*, readers of that period would have identified a profile of Alexander Pollock Watt in Heinemann's words. Yet this acrimonious and sarcastic description of an agent bears little comparison to that envisaged by Watt in 1875 but it does show the animosity that was prevalent at that time towards the idea of literary agents. A P Watt is reputed to be the founder of the profession of literary agent although Hepburn says he was 'not the first agent, as has been long supposed, but he was the first person with any sort of public reputation to undertake such work systematically, and for a good many years he was the only one'.<sup>6</sup> However, Heinemann's assessment of the literary agent was somewhat hypocritical considering his profession because, until the advent of agents, the publisher was the 'middleman' between the author and the printer-bookseller, thus causing much bitterness between publishers and authors. This antipathy towards each other increased markedly towards the end of the nineteenth century as authors accused publishers of cheating them, while publishers counterclaimed that authors were avaricious and only interested in lining their own pockets. Heinemann called on the Society of Authors, in the conclusion of his article, 'to kill the canker [the agent] that is eating itself into the very heart of our mutual interest.'

The Society of Authors was founded in 1884 by Walter Besant with the proclaimed aims of maintaining, defining and defending literary property, consolidating and amending the laws

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in James Hepburn, *The Author's Empty Purse and the Rise of the Literary Agent*, London: OUP, 1968. p1.

<sup>6</sup> Hepburn, p55.

of domestic copyright and promoting international copyright. In the first year they had sixty-eight members with Tennyson as President and Matthew Arnold, Thomas Henry Huxley, Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins as Vice-Presidents. By 1892 they had more than 900 and by 1914 they had 2,500.<sup>7</sup> The issue of copyright had been recognised as a major source of dissatisfaction among authors a century and a half before the first English Copyright Act of 1709.<sup>8</sup> Although the invention of printing gradually made manuscripts marketable, and the rise in literacy rates in the sixteenth century provided the markets, there was no developed system whereby the monies produced necessarily went into the author's pocket. It was the publisher who benefited. This unfortunate situation was compounded by the tradition of nonmaterialism since Elizabethan times when some authors were supported by patrons which meant that their livelihood did not depend on the sale of their work. Others would dedicate their work to a wealthy individual in the hope that the dedicatee would pay them something. It was believed to be beneath the dignity of a gentleman to ask for money from the printers and booksellers because of 'the exalted character of art'<sup>9</sup> and for a further 300 years this attitude helped to prevent authors from collectively establishing methods of payment for their work. The financial position of authors began to improve when the Copyright Act of 1709 gave them ownership of their own work. Prior to this date all the author owned was the actual manuscript in his hand. The copyright was surrendered to the printer in return for publication.

Despite the Copyright Act it was generally in the best interests of the author to sell his work outright to the publisher until nearly the end of the nineteenth century. The publisher took all the monetary risk but it also meant that he took all the profits whether large or small. Sometimes a publisher gave the author additional sums of money if the book was

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<sup>7</sup> Hepburn, p42.

<sup>8</sup> See Sir Frank Mackinnon, 'Notes on the History of English Copyright', Appendix II, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Margaret Drabble, Oxford: OUP, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Hepburn, p5.

particularly profitable but most of the time an author had to be content with fame, and perhaps the opportunity to negotiate a better financial deal on a subsequent book. Few authors could make a living from their writing but with the introduction of publishing by subscription, commission publishing and the half-profit system, the author's interests became a consideration. Collecting subscriptions guaranteed the market and determined the profit of the book before it was printed. Thus the author could go to the publisher and arrange a deal that reserved the major portion of the profits for himself but as Dr Johnson found out when he compiled a list for his edition of Shakespeare 'he that asks subscriptions soon finds that he has enemies.'<sup>10</sup> Commission publishing (later to become known as vanity publishing) was the same as subscription publishing but without the subscriptions and therefore not a sound commercial venture because no publisher was interested in promoting a book that offered him no profit beyond his original commission. This type of publishing was only successful when the author had already made a name for himself or if he had independent means, and in those cases the Society of Authors recommended it as the best system for the author as late as 1890.

The most advantageous system for both the author and publisher appeared to be the half-profit system whereby the author and publisher shared any profits equally, but for the impoverished author it was not a good scheme because there was no advance payment, which the author invariably needed, and if the book made a loss the author was, in theory, duty bound to help sustain it. This system, however, led to many claims by the authors of cheating by the publishers because their methods of accounting often showed losses, resulting in minimal payments to the author even though it appeared that the book concerned had sold well. In 1859 the editor of the *Critic*, James Lowe, reported on the subject:

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<sup>10</sup> S.v., 'Publishing, subscription', *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Margaret Drabble, Oxford: OUP, 1985.

I knew a case in which a charming little book was published by a firm well known in the trade, on the 'half-profit' system; the name of the author was not unknown to the public, and the sale was undoubtedly a very large one; but when the account came to be rendered, *three shillings and sixpence* was the sum tendered to the author as his fair share of the profits. Of course, I don't mean to hint that there had been any foul play here; all that I say is, that the plan is a very bad one. The story is funny enough, and this is not the case of a 'poor author', so we may fairly laugh at it.<sup>11</sup>

In 1867 the writer James Spedding wrote two essays about the half-profit system in which he theorised about the reason for the variable surcharges the publishers added to their accounts before the profits were divided. He had to have them printed at his own expense because he knew they would offend publishers and thereby damage the magazine that printed them. He further displeased publishers by offering a solution to the problem of their alleged cheating. He outlined the royalty system as practised by the Hurd and Houghton company in New York where all profits and losses were calculated by the publisher before offering a percentage royalty to the author on each copy of the book sold. This system was obviously an improvement over the half-profit system and outright sales but it took a further thirty years before it replaced the other two. Coincidentally, within that thirty years the rise in power of the literary agent became apparent thereby enhancing the bargaining position of authors.<sup>12</sup>

The Society of Authors, unable to make up its mind about the effectiveness of agents, sponsored an Authors' Syndicate in 1889. This was intended to be a non-profit making literary agency for all its members. It was run by William Morris Colles, a lawyer, who served as legal counsel for the Society, whose offices he shared at 4, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. The idea for the Syndicate came about because newspapers and magazines were introducing new works of fiction in weekly instalments and Colles's idea for serving as an agent for these outlets was welcomed by Besant, who wanted to collect as

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<sup>11</sup> Hepburn, p12.

<sup>12</sup> Hepburn, p13-14. Annabel Jones, in her case study of Disraeli's *Endymion* in *Essays in the History of Publishing: In Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the House of Longman 1724-1974*, edited by Asa Briggs, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1974, explains the various options open to authors in the 19th century and gives details about those used by Disraeli.

many opportunities as possible for his Society's members in the expanding journalistic market. Advertisements for the Syndicate appeared in the Society's journal *Author* and it listed eight points for consideration:

1. The management is voluntary and unpaid. No one makes any profit out of the Syndicate, except the authors who use its services.
2. The commission charged on the amounts received covers the expenses of clerks, travellers, rent and printing. As work increases this may be still further reduced.
3. Only the serial rights are sold for the author. He receives his volume rights and copyright.
4. The Syndicate has an American agent.
5. The Syndicate will only work for members of the Society.
6. Its offices are on the same floor as those of the Society, and its assistance and advice are always at the service of the Society.
7. Authors are warned that no syndicating is possible for them until they have already attained a certain amount of popularity.
8. The Syndicate acts as agent in every kind of literary property.<sup>13</sup>

A Syndicate that is not going to pay anyone to run it is obviously doomed to failure and the 5 per cent commission<sup>14</sup> charged for any successful placement of material for syndication was half that of the other literary agents which suggests that Colles was not really financially competent, and he is reported to have had difficulties with all the authors he represented. Yet he did keep up with the trends in the media market as his negotiations for film rights for the books of some of his authors demonstrates. But as his position in the literary field declined so too did the chances of the Society of Authors of establishing itself as a literary agency on at least equal terms with the private agencies such as A P Watt, J B Pinker, and Curtis Brown. The Syndicate eventually died with Colles in 1926.<sup>15</sup>

Alexander Watt was initially a publisher like many of the agents today. He left publishing to become an advertising agent before becoming a literary agent in 1878. He very quickly established himself as an adviser to a number of authors, negotiating contracts and selling publishing rights on their behalf. His standard commission of 10 per cent is still the

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<sup>13</sup> Robert A Colby, "'What Fools Authors Be!': The Authors Syndicate, 1890-1920", *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas*, 1986, Vol 35, p60.

<sup>14</sup> Colby, p63.

<sup>15</sup> Colby, p87.

percentage charged by the majority of agents today. James Pinker, whose agency was founded in 1896, was interested in new young authors (unlike Watt who preferred established authors) and he was unusual in asking his authors to sign contracts with him. This practice is now the norm 100 years later. His agency collapsed soon after his death in 1922. Curtis Brown, an American journalist, set up his agency soon after arriving in Britain in 1898. Like A P Watt, his agency is still in existence today, and, following the merger with John Farquharson in 1989, it is now the biggest in Britain.

Throughout the 1890s the three-cornered quarrel among the publishers, authors and agents simmered in various publications with all three accusing each other of being selfish and greedy, although the Society of Authors was more openly hostile towards the agents than the publishers. The publishers, however, believed that the agents interfered with the right relationship between author and publisher and by emphasising the commercial aspect they debased literature<sup>16</sup> which goes back to the notion that literature was 'an exalted art' and not to be tainted with commerce. Hepburn devotes a chapter to the intrigues between the three groups with William Heinemann featuring prominently and it was in 1901 the *Author* (the organ of the Society of Authors) gave Heinemann the opportunity to explain why he thought the agents served neither publisher, nor author, nor literature. He said that the agent should not intrude into the 'unquestioned mutual advantage' between a publisher and his author because 'I have not found literary agents scrupulously honest in their dealings' and he resented the 'implied imputation that the publisher might take advantage of an author'. With regards to the author Heinemann believed that it was an advantage for the author to be in close contact with his publisher and he rejected the assumption that the author could not take care of himself in the face of 'an overreaching publisher'. He also felt that the agent 'fosters in authors the greed for an immediate money return....at the cost of dignity and artistic repose....' and that the agent was only interested in established authors, not unknown ones,

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<sup>16</sup> Hepburn, p80.



because the share of the profits was higher. When it came to literature he did 'not consider it to be in the interests of literature that books should be put up for auction' because, he thought, it was 'against the interests of literature that authors should be pledged body and soul to syndicates and publishers' and it would discourage the publishers from taking on new authors.<sup>17</sup>

Heinemann's views were shared by many of the publishers as they quibbled and quarrelled over money. Who was to get what percentage? Who was entitled to any percentage? Whose royalties should be to whom? etc. However, the publishers were not the only ones in the book publishing trade who disputed matters. The agents themselves were known to work for both sides at times if it was to their advantage and the authors too would chop and change their allegiances if the benefits were greater somewhere else. As the role of the agent became generally more acceptable in the early part of the twentieth century, the obvious advantages to both sides erased any lingering doubts as to his efficacy. Many of the causes for the rise of the agent had been settled to the benefit of both the publisher and author. From those early beginnings the agent has gradually become an established and productive part of the book trade. By offering publishers manuscripts already assessed as marketable and suitable for that particular publishing house, they have saved that house considerable time and expense. The author believes himself to be secure in the knowledge that it is in the agent's best interest to negotiate the best possible deal on behalf of both of them. However, despite recognition for the literary agent as an actual entity and improvements in the publishing business, 100 years later the original problem still persists: the relative poverty of the author. The term 'relative' is used advisedly because there is no doubt that there is more money to be made in the book publishing trade today than there was 100 years ago, and it is not disputed that the agent has been a factor in raising the average royalty rate and opening up new markets for individual authors. Despite this, authors, on the whole, remain poor. Yet

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<sup>17</sup> Hepburn, p80-81.

however badly authors feel they are being paid for their work they continue to write even if their books do not sell; the compulsion to write must overpower their need to earn a living in an easier manner, otherwise why continue?

In 1965 a survey was conducted for the Society of Authors into the finances of its members. Of the 3,240 members, 1,587 responded to the enquiry; 46 per cent reported themselves as full-time writers and another 10 per cent reported themselves as nearly full-time. The survey revealed:

.... that just over a sixth earned on average more than £1,050 a year (ie over £20 a week), and that about one in ten earned between £550 and £1,050 a year. But the majority made less from their books. Nearly two thirds of them (61%) averaged less than six pounds a week; and as many as one third received no more than thirty shillings a week.

Recollect that most of the authors in question are not novices and hacks, but educated and experienced writers, each with a number of books to his or her credit.

.... nearly three quarters (71%) of those who had published books had earned *nothing at all* from their subsidiary rights ... just under a quarter (23%) received no more than £60 to £70 a year from this supplementary source, and just over a quarter earned *nothing at all*.<sup>18</sup>

Although these figures appear very poor now, with reference to the one in ten who earned between £550 and £1,050 the other nine could be police constables, for example, who earned £700 and senior Staff Nurses £680 in 1964, whilst student nurses would feature alongside the 61 per cent who averaged less than £6 per week.<sup>19</sup> However, a further survey carried out by the Society of Authors in 1997 revealed that of the 6,500 members '41% received advances against royalties of less than £5,000; 13% between £5,000 and £10,000; 11% between £10,000 and £25,000; and 6% more than £25,000 and most of these books would have taken more than a year to write'.<sup>20</sup> This implies that the majority of writers have fallen

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Findlater, *The Book Writers: Who Are They?*, pamphlet published by the Society of Authors, 1966.

<sup>19</sup> In a letter to *The Times* on 16 December 1999 Michael Cole said that he understood why Miss Christina Foyle left £59 million when she died. He remembers earning just over £1 for a nine-hour day in 1961.

<sup>20</sup> Giles Gordon, *The Times*, 6 February 1998.

far behind the average wage earner, and that in real terms their income has not increased at all significantly.<sup>21</sup>

A publisher is in business to make a profit for himself, his company and for his company's expansion yet the commodity that produces that profit gives the author only 10 to 15 per cent on the price of the book, less if it is a paperback. A tenth of that goes to the agent, of the rest, 50 to 60 per cent goes to the publisher and the bookseller claims a third. Further, the publisher and bookseller are collecting that percentage from hundreds of books, and the agent is collecting his tenth of a tenth from each of the authors he represents but the author is collecting his tiny proportion from perhaps only two or three books.

Not all authors have, or believe they need, agents. The Society of Authors, an independent trade union with more than five thousand members, publishes a pamphlet on agents in its Quick Guide series in which the Society lists twenty questions and answers to be considered before making the decision to employ an agent. The pamphlet is reasonably objective but the answer to question 2: 'Does everyone have an agent?' marginally reveals through its tone the Society's earlier mistrust of agents motives:

For many categories of writing it is extremely difficult to find an agent. Very few agents take on academic, technical or educational works, poetry, memoirs or short stories. Even fiction may not be attractive to an agent unless your first novel sold reasonably well and you can add the lure of enticing titles to come.

Agents, of course, earn their living from their commission. If your financial expectations from writing are not fairly substantial, agents are unlikely to feel that their commission will cover their costs. Alas, agents are particularly hesitant about authors writing in their retirement when the chances of building up a lasting full-time career are reduced. Even if publishers say that they will only look at manuscripts from agencies, this may well frequently be used as an excuse, not a reason, for rejecting material.

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<sup>21</sup> The average weekly earnings in 1965 were £19.59 for men and £9.60 for women; in 1993 it was £360.4 for men and £258.5 for women. The lowest paid worker among the jobs listed was a Textile Worker (weaver) who earned 187s. (£9.35) per week. (By 1993 a male Police Constable was earning £431.4, a female Police Constable £378; a male Staff Nurse £321.9, a female Staff Nurse £295.7, and a Textile Worker £157.4). Figures from *The Value of the Pound: Prices and Incomes in Britain 1900-1993*, Compiled by Oksana Newman and Allan Foster, Manchester Business School Library and Information Service, Gale International Research Ltd, Andover, 1995.

Many members of the Society do not have agents. Furthermore, not all of those are without agents because they cannot find one - some very successful writers prefer to make their own deals, and keep 100% of their earnings.<sup>22</sup>

Another point is also worth looking at because it reveals yet more of the Society's doubts about the monetary motives of agents whilst slipping in one of its reminders of the usefulness of the Society. In answer to the question: 'Is it worth having an agent?' the first part of the answer points out the advantages of having an agent to deal with the business side of the profession. Nevertheless, the second paragraph is not quite so impartial:

Bear in mind, however, that an indifferent agent will be of little value. He/she will simply allow you to make contacts and sell the ideas, while taking commission for drawing up routine contacts [sic]. If you have your own contacts, prefer to keep personal control over the sale of your work, and enjoy negotiations (backed by advice from the Society), you may well decide not to have an agent.

The further seventeen questions and answers in the pamphlet give helpful advice about the work of agencies and the author's position. It ends with a brief explanation of the work of the Association of Authors' Agents, formed in 1974,<sup>23</sup> but the statement: 'The AAA is a trade association comprising the *majority* of authors' agents in the UK' (my italics) is not borne out by the listings of agencies in yearbooks. Neither is a similar assertion by the Association's President, Caroline Dawnay, that 'the Association of Authors' Agents represents the large preponderance of literary agents in this country.'<sup>24</sup> The 1999 edition of A&C Black's *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* lists 150 United Kingdom and Ireland agencies, or 158 if those amalgamated with others are counted, and of these only fifty-five are asterisked as being full members of the AAA.

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<sup>22</sup> The Society of Authors Quick Guide 9, *Authors' Agents*.

<sup>23</sup> In the late 1920s Raymond Savage, an agent, had tried to form an Association of Authors' Agents but failed because the three biggest agencies (Curtis Brown, J B Pinker, and A P Watt) refused to support it, others were suspicious, and it was not in the interests of the incompetent agent to join. He tried again in 1937 and joined with two firms to form the Society of Literary Agents but the big three refused again to support him and it failed. (Hepburn, p98)

<sup>24</sup> Personal letter, 3 December 1996.

	1999	1997	1987	1977	1967
<b>Number of Agencies</b>	150	133	107	75	71
<b>With Amalgamations</b>	158	139	110	80	76
<b>Full Members of AAA</b>	55	55	33		

Looking back at the figures for 1997 and 1987 as shown in the table above the number of AAA members are similarly low.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, the 1997 edition's list of American agents and agencies show proportionally different figures for those marked as being members of their Association of Authors' Representatives. Of ninety-seven listed sixty-nine are asterisked. (The Americans also appear to have a greater number of female agents, or agencies run by women, as far as one can tell from gender specific names. Of the ninety-seven listed in 1997, forty-nine appear to be run by women. The comparable figure for the United Kingdom appears to be forty-eight out of 133.)

The Code of Practice, which has been designed for the protection of the author, lays out in detail the duties of an agent, but Michael Legat says:

The problem with the Code of Practice is that the Association of Authors' Agents has no real sanction to employ against any member who offends unforgivably, other than expulsion from the Association, which might not particularly worry the punished agency. Nevertheless, the Code's heart is in the right place (if a Code may be said to have a heart), and it seems to work.<sup>26</sup>

Mark Le Fanu, the General Secretary of the Society of Authors, when asked what the Society did about errant agents, replied: 'We don't have many problems with errant agents, but we are spending more time advising members than in the past on the consequences of agents moving between agencies and on authors wishing to move from one agency to another.'<sup>27</sup> Le Fanu does not give examples therefore one can only surmise which of the changes and

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<sup>25</sup> Presumably when the Agencies data was being collected for the 1977 *Yearbook* edition it was too soon after the 1974 AAA formation for numbers to be available.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Legat, *An Author's Guide to Literary Agents*, London: Robert Hale, 1995. p103.

<sup>27</sup> Personal letter, 3 December, 1996.

moves mentioned in articles in the press, asked the Society for advice. The agent Giles Gordon 'lost Fay Weldon to the charms of an American agent', namely Ed Victor;<sup>28</sup> and when Gordon left the agency Sheil Land after 23 years and moved to their rivals Curtis Brown, there was speculation about which of his authors he would take with him, especially in the case of Vikram Seth, who, at that time was a bestselling, thus very lucrative, author.<sup>29</sup> Because of the constant changes in editorial staff at large publishing houses it makes it very difficult for an author to build up a relationship with an editor so it is often the agent who becomes the mainstay in an author's life. 'The relationship between an agent and his/her author is a highly personal one, cemented over many a liquid lunch, and though the contract is with the firm for which the agent works, the loyalty is often to the individual rather than the organisation' said Magnus Linklater, writing about the controversy surrounding 'the bizarre case of the literary agent, the bestselling authors, and the injunction that is keeping them apart' after the agency Sheil Land issued a High Court injunction against Giles Gordon 'restraining him from "canvassing, soliciting, approaching, or enticing away ... any client of the plaintiff" '.<sup>30</sup> There was similar speculation when Mark Lucas left Peters Fraser and Dunlop to set up on his own, about which of his bestselling authors he would take with him.<sup>31</sup> More recently, the novelist Jilly Cooper left her agent, Desmond Elliot, after twenty-five years and moved to Curtis Brown because 'she had rethought their relationship after the critics had savaged her first murder mystery, *Score!*'<sup>32</sup>

Not all agents belong to the Association of Authors' Agents, although the agent Felicity Bryan thinks it is to the agent's advantage to do so, especially if it is a single agent agency

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<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 7 May 1994.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 29 July 1995.

<sup>30</sup> *The Times*, 13 October 1995. A few weeks later it was reported that Sheil Land withdrew their objections and Giles Gordon was able to keep all his authors. Magnus Linklater's view that an author's 'loyalty is often to the individual rather than the organisation' appears to be validated in this case.

<sup>31</sup> *The Times*, 1 July 1996.

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 23 September 1999.

like hers, because it helps her to keep abreast of the current affairs in her field. Others may not qualify because they may not have been in business long enough to meet the standards of experience. They must have been in business for a minimum of three years and have an annual income of at least £25,000.<sup>33</sup> Therefore it is not surprising that more than half the agents and agencies are not asterisked in the listings because so many of them have only been in business a few years. In the 1999 *Yearbook*, there are 114 with recorded foundation dates. Of these there are thirty-five with 1990s foundation dates, thirty-seven with 1980s dates, twenty with 1970s dates, eight with 1960s dates, five with 1950s dates, and nine pre-1950s dates, which gives an average age of 20.6 years for all the agencies (21.1 in 1997). There are seven dated pre-1936 agencies listed: Rupert Crew Ltd.(1927), Film Rights Ltd.(1932), Eric Glass Ltd.(1932), A M Heath & Co. Ltd.(1919), David Higham Associates Ltd.(1935), International Copyright Bureau Ltd.(1905), and A P Watt (1875), and if they were excluded from the total then the average age is reduced to sixteen years (seventeen in 1997). The Curtis Brown agency does not include its 1899 foundation date in its entry in the *Yearbook* but if it had it would have further reduced the average age.

The 'youth' of the Agencies is an indication of change in the book publishing trade: agents are taking over the role of editors. In 1981 there were 41,700 people employed in the printing and publishing of books, but by 1986 this figure had shrunk to 34,100; yet the number of books published rose from 43,083 to 57,845 in the same time period.<sup>34</sup> But, as the publishing workforce decreases, the numbers of agents and agencies increases. It could be argued that agents, in editing their client's work to make it more attractive to the publisher, are denying editorial staff their function, thus the publishing houses are able to dispense with their services. Therefore, it would appear that the more agents edit the less publishing house editors are needed; thus the decreasing number of editors means that more

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<sup>33</sup> Legat, 1995, p15.

<sup>34</sup> *Book Trade Yearbook*, J Whitaker and Sons Ltd, 1989.

agents must edit which, in turn, suggests that more agents are needed because editing takes time. The agent, Ed Victor, commented in the *Tatler* (May, 1994) that 'the trickle of publishing people moving from one side of the desk to the other has become a veritable flood ...' He names, as examples, Hilary Rubinstein and Giles Gordon who, like himself left publishing about twenty years ago, and Jonathan Lloyd, David Godwin, Frances Coady and Michael Attenborough as more recent examples. He then goes on to ask the question: 'Where are all these capable and connected people going to find clients to represent?' but does not specifically answer it. One answer, from another source,<sup>35</sup> appears to be that these 'capable and connected people' break an unwritten agents' law and poach them from other agents, with David Godwin cited as an example. Andrew Wylie, commonly known as 'The Jackal', is accused of doing the same thing.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps Walter Ellis, writing in the *Sunday Times*,<sup>37</sup> has the answer: 'Everybody still wants to be an author. In Britain there will soon be one published author for every 500 potential readers' which implies that the likelihood of author poverty is not a deterrent. With nearly 675,000 titles currently in print, some 80,000 titles being published each year (10 per cent of which are fiction), spending on books having risen by more than 50 per cent since 1985 and 13,000 organisations in Britain publishing books,<sup>38</sup> the rise in agents numbers appears to be justified. This is especially since there are now new areas of commercial interest to exploit such as new markets in east and central Europe, film, television and video rights, merchandising, and multimedia rights. One of the newest entrants into the world of 'literary' agency is Mark McCormack's IMG. Originally an American agency dealing with sports celebrities, classical musicians and broadcasting personalities, it has now branched into

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<sup>35</sup> *The Times*, 8 December 1997.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times* Saturday magazine, 9 January 1999.

<sup>37</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 6 October 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Lisa Buckingham, *Guardian*, 6 May 1995, quoting evidence to Heritage Select Committee from PA, BA and Hodder.



literature in the US and UK charging a higher fee (home/US 20 per cent, an increase of 5 per cent since 1997, elsewhere 25 per cent) than the 10 per cent UK norm. By looking again at the *Yearbook* at the other 149 agencies listed, which are not all strictly 'literary', it is possible to see from where all these new agents are getting material. Nearly all of them have specific areas of interest. For example: Peter Bryant (Writers) specialise in 'animation, children's fiction and TV comedy'; Real Creatives Worldwide are 'producers and directors of motion pictures and TV commercials' and 'package movie ideas and scripts for submission to Hollywood studios and TV companies worldwide', whereas Andrew Nurnberg Associates Ltd specialise in 'the sale of translation rights of English and American authors into European languages'. Nurnberg, whose agency represents some UK and US agencies throughout the world, has offices staffed by locals in Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States, where the office in Riga sells to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In an article in *The Bookseller*,<sup>39</sup> he discusses the changing profile of the international rights market and the place of the agent within it. He says that there is no room for lazy agents because the book market is now more complex and agents need to know what they are selling since what sells in one country does not necessarily sell in another. The energy and enthusiasm of the agent remains the key technique for getting a book sold.

With the publishers, book clubs and booksellers increasing their press, television and radio advertising expenditure from £15,136 in 1981 to £43,205 in 1993,<sup>40</sup> the agents have been able to exploit this factor to the advantage of some of their more well known and prize-winning authors by arranging events such as: book signings, tours, new commissions, television appearances, places on juries for competitions and 'writers in residence' placements. In comparison with the number of authors published very few of them,

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<sup>39</sup> 'The global perspective', *The Bookseller LIBF Preview*, 5 March 1999.

<sup>40</sup> *Book Publishing in Britain*, Bookseller Publications, J Whitaker and Sons Ltd, 1995.

especially new authors, get opportunities to improve their finances this way though there are notable exceptions some of whom became millionaires with their first books, for example: Nicholas Evans with *The Horse Whisperer*, Linda Davies with *Nest of Vipers* and Jung Chang with *Wild Swans*. One unique way of bringing the public's attention indirectly to a new writer is that devised by a computer company. In early October 1999 there was a article in *The Times* concerning Steven Erikson who had been offered 'an unprecedented package for a novice writer: a book a year for the next nine years' and how he wrote the whole book 'on a palmtop computer'. Ten days later there was a large advertisement in the same paper for Psion palmtop computers featuring a section of the original article - newly entitled 'Dream deal for fantasy writer' - with the name 'Psion' cleverly inserted into the article between 'palmtop' and 'computer'. Unfortunately Patrick Walsh, Erikson's agent, could not claim to have been responsible for this piece of publicity but his author was supplied with a new computer.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the opportunities for some authors to gain more financially, the demise of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in 1995, which axed the fixed price of books and led to the fluctuation of book prices, threatened the meagre income of many because reports in the trade press suggested that the publishers wanted to renegotiate the royalty rate for their authors. At present four-fifths of the prevailing royalty rate is payable on deals where a publisher has agreed to sell copies of a title at a discount higher than 50 per cent for hardbacks and 52.5 per cent for paperbacks. The publishers wanted the royalty rate reduced to three-fifths of the prevailing rate, or a percentage based on the price received rather than that of the published price, but, so far, this reduction has been resisted. The Association of Authors' Agents president, Caroline Dawnay, issued a statement urging publishers to resist 'the current temptation to make further inroads into authors already depleted and

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<sup>41</sup> Personal telephone conversation, 17 November 1999. Annabel Jones, in her essay (see Note 12) details the newspaper advertising schemes used by publishers for Disraeli's *Endymion* in the 1880s which shows that imaginative advertising is not new.

proportionately tiny income from book sales. Authors have already taken enough of the pain, and it's up to the publishers to sort out the trading problem.<sup>42</sup>

Prior to this problem, in 1993, the Society of Authors conducted a survey of its members to find out what they thought about their literary agents and the results were published in the *Author* in the spring of 1994. Of the 5,000 members approximately half, including almost all those who work in academic and educational fields, do not have agents and of the remaining 2,500 just 494 replied and these responses covered 106 agencies. They were asked about their feelings towards their agents (the majority loved their agents), about their requirements, the size of the agency, about loyalty, and about contracts. The final part of the questionnaire covered the negative aspects of agencies and four subjects came up fairly often: one, meanness on the part of the agent, for example: extra charges made by the agent in respect of postage, photocopying and the purchase of extra copies of a published book to send to foreign publishers, two, not enough effort made by the agent with regard to the selling of translation, United States, film, radio and television rights, three, not enough interest taken in new authors and too much attention paid to big name authors, and four, the agent taking commission on a deal which had been initiated by the author and negotiated directly with a publisher or other purchaser. Overall 83 per cent believed that their agent gave them good service.<sup>43</sup>

One suspects that the authors who believe that their agent gives them good service are those who are fortunate enough to be able to make a living from their writing but the average advance for a first novel is still only between £3,000 and £8,000. Andrew Wylie's 'excuse' for demanding inflationary advances, as in the well documented case of Martin Amis, is that he believes 'that a publisher will only be motivated to sell a book if he pays a lot of money for

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<sup>42</sup> *The Bookseller*, 8 December 1995.

<sup>43</sup> Legat, 1995, p105-111.

it'. But 'whenever this happens' says the publisher Tom Rosenthal, 'the danger is that anything from two to half-a-dozen perfectly decent mid-list authors will get starved'.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless Jonny Geller agrees with Wylie: 'I've heard publishers say that anything for which they have paid less than £10,000 they don't even look at it, in terms of marketing. More than £20,000 then the marketing director might start to get interested. Over £50,000? Yes, things start to happen.'<sup>45</sup> This focus on money means that the advance an author receives can be seen as a guide to his or her commercial worth which must be very disheartening for them and cause a certain amount of discontent and envy among those who are never likely to receive huge advances for their work. Yet it is the author's choice to write a book just as it is the publisher's choice not to spend a great deal promoting it, and the reader's choice whether or not to buy it.

A further survey was conducted by the Society of Authors in 1998 and this time they received 507 responses reporting on 98 different agencies. The overall percentage of those generally satisfied with their agent was the same as in 1994. Michael Legat, who analysed both sets of responses, says that he is disappointed with the 1998 result because 'what the labour has brought forth is pretty much of a mouse - at least a mouse in the sense that very little new has been revealed'.<sup>46</sup> Legat might think that little new had been revealed but in the context of 1990s publishing there are several new results which indicate that the relationship between agent and author is becoming more businesslike. For example: 52 per cent of the authors say that they had 'some form of written contract or exchange of letters with the agent which is a substantial increase on the 30 per cent recorded in 1994'. Of the remaining 48 per cent without a contract Legat says 'it is clear that a majority are clients of long standing, first taken on by their agencies in the days before anyone had thought of formalising their relationship'. But with nearly all their new authors, agents are signing letters of agreement.

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<sup>44</sup> Boyd Tonkin, *The Independent*, 18 December 1996.

<sup>45</sup> Jason Cowley, 'Pitch Invader', *The Times Saturday magazine*, 9 January 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Legat, 'The Survey of Authors' Agents', *The Author*, Winter 1998.

Legat also reports that the percentage the agent is collecting from his authors is now less. In 1994 he found several instances of a 17.5 per cent fee and a few at 20 per cent. In 1998 'a basic 10 per cent on UK earnings is still the norm. Twenty-eight authors said that they paid 15 per cent, nine paid 12.5 per cent, and a handful, mostly clients of one of the big agencies, paid 15 per cent on the first book, reverting to 10 per cent for subsequent titles' (which suggests the IMG agency authors failed to answer this question). The section of the questionnaire that dealt with the payments due to the author produced a similar result to 1994; 93 per cent of authors said that the money was paid promptly and was accounted for correctly.

Another area where Legat found a change was the number of agencies that received a positive answer to the question about satisfaction with the overall service provided. In 1994 he was able to list twelve, each having been the subject of at least five reports, but in 1998 there are only three: John Johnson (with eight reports) and Felicity Bryan and Gregory & Radice (each with five reports). Of the fifteen reports on A P Watt one was negative and a further eleven agencies had 'very respectable ratings'.

The complaints about meanness on the part of the agent, especially in respect of photocopying charges, came up again in 1998 but complaints about negotiating contracts, the use of sub-agents and rights sales appear to be less. Legat found that many authors failed to fill in the section dealing with sub-agents and rights but of those that did, the satisfied far outweighed those that were not. Another question that 170 authors either failed to answer or to which they did not know the answer concerned the termination of contracts. Two hundred and thirty-seven authors said that they did not have to give a period of notice if they wanted to leave their agent, which, Legat points out, correlates with the figure of those who did not have a written contract, and of the rest the period of notice varied from less than a month to more than a year.

It is quite understandable if an author moves from one agent or agency to another in search of a better deal because it is due to the power of the agent that there are such significant discrepancies in levels of advances. The media attention given to record figure advances and more frequently as the 1990s have progressed to the agents that broker them, means that anyone, who is interested, is aware of them because book trade revelations are not confined to the book pages. They are now 'news' and as such often command as much space as an international incident. In the last few years several literary agents have been mentioned or written about at intervals in just *The Times*, such as: David Godwin, Nick Marston, Andrew Wylie, Caradoc King, Caroline Dawnay, Gillon Aitken, Pat Kavanagh, Georgina Capel, Ed Victor, Mark Lucas, Carole Blake, Jonathan Lloyd, Giles Gordon, Simon Trewin and Jonny Geller, the agent to whom Jason Cowley was referring when he said: 'Seldom does a literary agent emerge from the shadows to become more talked about than the authors he represents'.<sup>47</sup> Although Cowley qualifies that statement with the word 'seldom' it is still worth disputing. Multiply *The Times* articles with all the other broadsheets and the trade press and it soon becomes apparent that several of the agents listed above, as an example, have become something of a celebrity in their own right. Whether having a celebrity agent translates into a better financial deal for the average author has not been proven, but for the celebrity author having a celebrity agent definitely ensures a mutually profitable partnership.

Hepburn, whose 1968 book is still the definitive book on the history of agents, says in his conclusion:

If the question of literary agency has been answered by history, another question remains unsolved - the one that some people thought literary agency itself would solve: the plight of the author. Literary agency has helped to raise the average royalty rate of authors, has opened new markets to individual authors, is a virtual necessity to full-time authors; yet authors remain poor.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jason Cowley, *The Times* Saturday magazine, 9 January 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Hepburn, p100.

Thirty years after Hepburn's book was published my conclusion is the same: authors do remain poor. And, no doubt, a certain percentage of authors always will be poor because even if their agent see enough merit in their work to get a publisher to publish it there is no obligation on the part of the readers to buy it. However, it has to be remembered that it is the authors, poor or otherwise, who provide the basic components for the 'wheeler dealers' in the book publishing trade - without them there would be no trade and no literary agents.

## CHAPTER 3

### Literary Prizes

The problem of the average author's poverty has not been resolved despite all the changes in the book publishing trade and the increasing use of literary agents so, if an author feels that he/she must write, it therefore becomes necessary to look elsewhere for ways and means to alleviate some of their financial predicaments, albeit temporarily, through, for example, prize money for the lucky few, or possible grants and awards. Those lucky enough to win a prestigious prize like the Booker know that they are likely to be catapulted into the bestseller lists immediately and therefore worries about author poverty can be forgotten.

When Richard Todd published his book *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*<sup>1</sup> in 1996 he was, perhaps, responding to an article in *The Bookseller* in 1993 by Al Senter, a freelance arts journalist, in which Senter said:

...there does not appear to have been any formal market research carried out into the impact of book prizes on the public. Evidence tends to be either mounds of press cuttings or anecdotal feedback from the trade'.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, plenty of published information about the prizes themselves in, for example, writers' handbooks. The 1999 *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* lists details of 200 awards and bursaries in a variety of categories, which is a considerable increase in number from the forty-three listed in the 1967 edition and the seventy-eight listed in the 1977 edition, but the definitive guide to literary prizes in Britain is published by Book Trust and in their 1999 edition they have 126 listed. These are categorised under forty-four different subject headings in the index ranging from African Writers to Women's Studies, but the fiction prizes, in which my particular interest lies, can be further sub-divided by such groupings as the age and sex of the writer, the geographical location of the book and the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, London: Bloomsbury, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Al Senter, *The Bookseller*, 19 November 1993, p28.



amount of prize money. The associated publishing deals are almost as varied as the prize categories. There are very few prizes which cater for unpublished fiction authors and they all have some sort of condition attached to them: the Fidler Award is for children's writing; the story has to be set in the Lichfield area for the Lichfield Prize; the Ian St James, and Tom-Gallon Trust Awards are for short stories; the author must be over forty for the McKitterick Prize and under thirty-five for the Betty Trask award, and, to win a Romantic Novelists Association New Writers Award the author must be a probationary member of the Association. This means that a further percentage of writers are immediately excluded from the opportunity of securing a prize.

The most lucrative prize (except the Nobel which is for a lifetime's work) is the £100,000 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award<sup>3</sup> which was won for the first time in 1996 by the Australian author David Malouf for *Remembering Babylon*. The award is given to a work of fiction written and published in the English language, or written in a language other than English and published in English translation, in which case the translator gets £25,000 of the prize money. The work is chosen from a shortlist of eight titles selected by varying numbers of libraries in varying numbers of cities. The number of libraries involved changes from year to year as new ones are added to the list and others decline to nominate for one reason or another. For the year 2000 prize there are over ninety-one libraries ('over' ninety-one because the London Borough libraries nominate as a group and the Literary Award office is not sure how many of the thirty-four actually take part) which can nominate up to three books each, from eighty-nine cities in thirty-four countries. Between them they have nominated 130 different books but twenty-nine turned out to be ineligible, so 101 will be considered for the prize.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of this prize is that the

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<sup>3</sup> IMPAC is an American management and consultancy firm with its European headquarters in the city.

<sup>4</sup> Personal email, 3 November 1999, from Brendan Teeling, Senior Librarian, Literary Award Office.

winner is announced in the May of each year but the prize is not presented until June, and then it is in a quiet ceremony in Dublin, which eliminates the pressure of sitting through a dinner, for example, waiting for the winner's name to be announced. This lack of 'razzmatazz', which is usually the norm for major prize giving ceremonies, suggests that this prize is a more genuine attempt to help an author rather than just an excuse to advertise the company supplying it.

Announcements about new prizes in various fields with conditions attached have become a fairly regular occurrence in the past few years. For instance: the International Prize, reported in *The Times* on 3 June 1999, is 'to be awarded annually by six publishers in different countries; in Britain it will be Penguin, Gallimard in France and Mondadori in Italy. Each publisher will submit a new novel and the best will be guaranteed publication by all six', but, unusually, there is no monetary prize for the author. Another, on 24 June 1999, is the Caine Prize, worth \$15,000, for African Writing set up in memory of Sir Michael Caine, the ex-Chairman of Booker McConnell. News about future awards can be assumed when it is noted, for example, that people have left money in their wills to establish literary funds,<sup>5</sup> or when articles appear in the press such as the following:

A gang of British novelists and publishers has deemed the Booker Prize so dull and out of touch that they are launching an alternative. The new prize will "champion writers with vitality, intensity and an ability to dramatise life today", according to Nicholas Blincoe, the editor at Sceptre, Elaine Palmer, from Pulp Books, and the novelists Matt Thorne and Jeff Noon. Experimentation will be championed and historical fiction, including novels set in the two world wars, discouraged. Fiction-00 (the numerals will change each year), will cover short stories and novels. The organisers hope to raise £50,000 in prize money.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Marjorie Hessel Tiltman who died 26 February 1999, left £100,000 to PEN to establish a literary prize fund. Obituary, *The Times* 2 April 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Alex O'Connell, *The Times*, 27 October 1999. This new prize idea appears to be in response to the claims that the 1999 Booker Prize selections were dull. 'It was a list that failed to ignite passions and promoted questions about the Booker's purpose' and Giles Gordon, quoted in the same article, said: 'They are mostly mediocre books...there is a shortage of imagination.' *The Times*, 22 September 1999. The retailer Books etc. were also dismayed at the shortlist because big names like Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie were missing 'in favour of lesser knowns', so they promoted their own list of six authors instead. *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

The primary purpose of literary prizes is to sell books and publicity is essential to that purpose regardless of whether it is somewhat negative, like that in the quote above, or positive. Any publicity ensures that a prize winner gains twice financially - once from the prize itself, and secondly from the increase in sales which the publicity generates. But for those authors ignored by prize committees there are other opportunities for them to gain monetary help. Book Trust list thirteen grants, awards and bursaries of variable amounts of money available for authors who are published and those who are struggling to get published. The most advantageous appears to be the David T K Wong Fellowship in Creative Writing because this is an annual award of £25,000 and it allows the Fellow (Dr Jose Dalisay for the year 1999/2000)<sup>7</sup> to spend a year at the University of East Anglia without any teaching commitments, pursuing his/her own work. The Royal Literary Fund, which has been helping to relieve writers in distress since 1790, also provides funds to support one-year residencies for writers in British universities and colleges, as well as providing funds for individuals. This Fund is fortunate in that its income has increased to keep pace with demand, mainly as a result of the payments from the Pooh Properties Trust.<sup>8</sup> A more modest award, £7,000, is given by the Arts Council of England to fifteen writers with work in progress each year and the judges have no idea to whom they are giving the awards as the hundreds of manuscripts they are asked to read are anonymous. Although there are many categories for this award age is no barrier<sup>9</sup> but the recipients must already be published.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Information supplied by J Striker, University of East Anglia.

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by The Royal Literary Fund.

It was reported that the Royal Literary Fund received £90 million from the estate of A A Milne, after the Walt Disney corporation decided to pay Milne's estate over £200 million for the film rights to Winnie the Pooh for another 25 years. The literary agency Curtis Brown who negotiated the deal on behalf of the Milne estate is expected to receive up to £7 million in commission from the deal. *The Times*, 9 June 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The novelist Lettice Cooper was given a bursary when she was seventy so that she could return to novel writing full-time. Obituary, *The Times*, 26 July 1994.

<sup>10</sup> J K Rowling had an £8,000 writers bursary from the Scottish Arts Council in February 1997 to help her while she was writing the second Harry Potter novel.

Literary prizes are not a new phenomenon. The James Tait Black Memorial Prizes were instituted in 1918 in memory of a partner of the publishing firm of A&C Black Ltd (supported since 1979 by the Scottish Arts Council). The Hawthornden Prize was founded in 1919 by Miss Alice Warrender; the *Mail on Sunday* John Llewellyn Rhys Prize was founded in 1942 by Jane Oliver, the widow of a young writer killed in action in World War II; the Author's Club First Novel Award was introduced by Laurence Maynell in 1954; followed by the first of the Crime Writer's Association awards in 1955. But it was the annual Booker Prize, established in 1968, which brought the subject of literary prizes closer to the attention of the reading public, particularly so since 1976 when the presentation dinner was televised for the first time. It was introduced by the Booker McConnell food company ostensibly to allay the fears of publishers and book shop owners that readers were no longer reading novels, but the main reason was commercial: to boost the profits of their interesting sideline, the management of the affairs of certain very successful fiction writers, such as Ian Fleming,<sup>11</sup> Agatha Christie, Dennis Wheatley, Georgette Heyer, Robert Bolt, and Harold Pinter whose copyright they owned.<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1960s income tax 'at Fleming's level of income, was almost equivalent to confiscation'<sup>13</sup> so Jock Campbell, the Managing Director of the Booker company and a friend of Ian Fleming, had set up the Authors' Division to benefit from a loophole in the UK Finance Act which led to a 'substantial advantage to both Ian Fleming and Booker plc and to the substantial disadvantage of The Exchequer.'<sup>14</sup> Booker envisaged adding more best

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Personal email correspondence with Jenny Brown of the SAC.

<sup>11</sup> Fleming originally sold 'himself' to Booker in 1963 to lower his tax burden but after 33 years the Fleming family are back in control with a 51% stake in Glidrose, the company that owns the copyright. *The Times*, 17 January 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Sir Michael H. Caine, 'the booker story', *booker 30: a celebration of 30 years of the booker prize for fiction 1969-1998*, p6/7. This was a non-published book compiled by the management committee and given to each of the guests at the 1998 prize winning dinner.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p6.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

selling authors and prestige to their auxiliary literary business with the introduction of their prize, but W L Webb, literary editor of *The Guardian* and chairman of the judges in the founding year, had different ideas. '(He) saw it as a chance to make a prize for the novel which would both set standards and spread the word, benefiting both the form and its authors by increasing their readership and their sales.'<sup>15</sup> He also disagreed with Booker's suggestion of having show business characters among the judges. With his insistence on judges with respected literary authority, Booker's promise of money for publicity, and the £5,000 prize money, he wanted to create a prize to rival the French Prix Goncourt and the American Pulitzer Fiction Prize.<sup>16</sup> Until then literary prize money in Britain was a few hundred pounds and the lack of funds for publicity meant that very few people were aware that a prize had been awarded. Thus the Booker, with its punning connection to the word 'book', was launched and it has become one of the most prestigious and famous in Britain and the Commonwealth today with the prize money having been increased gradually to £21,000<sup>17</sup> for the winner and £1,000 for each of the short-listed writers. Although Caine said that 'we have not been seeking, and will not seek, to recognize or create bestsellers'<sup>18</sup> there is no doubt that nearly all the books that win the Booker Prize, and, in some cases, those that are nominated, have become bestsellers. According to Martyn Goff 'it is important to emphasise' he says 'that once an author has broken the Booker barrier, then the likelihood is that his or her books, as well as all sorts of rights, will go on selling at previously undreamt of levels.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> W L Webb, *The Times* 'Booker of Bookers' supplement, 21 September 1993, pIII.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Booker Prize took its inspiration from France's Prix Goncourt. Seventeen years later, *Le Figaro* referred to the Goncourt as the "French Booker".' Caine, p6.

<sup>17</sup> This includes the £1,000 for being short-listed.

<sup>18</sup> Caine, p12.

<sup>19</sup> Martyn Goff, (ed.), *Prize Writing: An Original Collection of Writings by Past Winners to Celebrate 21 years of The Booker Prize*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989. p22.

In September 1993, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Booker, three former chairmen of judges, David Holloway, Malcolm Bradbury and W L Webb were asked to choose the book which they believed to be the best of the previous winners. They chose Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which won the prize in 1981, as the Booker of Bookers. Each of the three judges gave their reasons for their choice, all eminently laudable, but Bradbury made a disputable point by saying: 'It was for entirely artistic reasons...'<sup>20</sup> There will always be scepticism - author solidarity comes to mind. Although Rushdie gained nothing financially from this particular award the publicity revived the worldwide interest in his predicament over his novel *The Satanic Verses*<sup>21</sup> so what he lost in monetary terms from this award he gained in increased publicity for *The Satanic Verses* which helped to maintain its bestseller status.

Senter's observation about the lack of market research on the subject of literary prizes is almost as valid in 1999 as it was in 1993. The press cuttings mound has continued to grow, especially in respect of the Booker, and the trade anecdotes about the prizes contribute most to the column inches. *The Times*, in their Booker of Bookers supplement, asked six Booker winners about what the prize meant to them,<sup>22</sup> but there is very limited material about the thoughts and feelings of winners of less prestigious prizes. Interspersed among the Booker cuttings there are articles about other literary prizes but there appears to be a direct correlation between the amount of prize money being offered and the funds available for publicity, unless a controversy can be generated by a disaffected loser or an unusual winner, for example. Publicity is the key to the success of all prizes because it is the publicity that encourages sales and in turn the increased sales advertise the prize.

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *The Times* 'Booker of Bookers' supplement, 21 September 1993, pIII.

<sup>21</sup> The fatwa pronounced by President Khomeini of Iran, February 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Penelope Lively (who won the prize in 1987), Anita Brookner (1984), Bernice Rubens (1970), Michael Ondaatje (1992), Ben Okri (1991), and Iris Murdoch (1978).

One approach to the subject of literary prizes, and it is the one used here in 1995, was to work through the lists of available prizes in the relevant handbooks and to pick out those that were awarded for adult fiction and with the fewest conditions attached to them, such as age, themes, nationality/region, or whether previously published. Letters were sent to the twenty-three administrators asking about how the judges were chosen, how a particular book came to the attention of the judges, the criteria by which a particular book was chosen to receive the prize, and who provided the prize money. This approach, along with talking to winners of prizes and to people in the book trade, was an attempt to find information beyond that already printed.

Sixteen administrators answered the letter or telephoned with variable amounts of information ranging from bare details to glossy brochures produced for prize-giving lunches (W H Smith) and wall charts listing previous winners (the Booker). Added to the requested information came some interesting extra material: W H Smith sent details of their involvement in local communities and education, which is impressive; and the Arthur C Clarke award details came from the University of Liverpool with data about The Science Fiction Foundation Collection, housed in their Special Collections Department in the Sydney Jones Library, which was set up to promote science fiction as an educational tool.<sup>23</sup>

Six of the literary prize sponsors contacted were newspapers: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *Mail on Sunday*, *Yorkshire Post*, *Express on Sunday*, and *The Sunday Times*, but only the last three responded to the enquiry. Harry Ritchie, who had recently resigned as the editor of *The Sunday Times* book section, was asked why newspapers gave literary prizes and he said that 'although they were loss leaders and provided minimal return they kept up

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<sup>23</sup> The Science Fiction Foundation Collection is the largest collection of material relating to Science Fiction in the European Community and one of the two or three most important outside the USA. It was established as the research library of the Science Fiction Foundation, created in 1970 by George Hay with Arthur C Clarke and Ursula LeGuin as patrons.

the profile of the paper as being a literary paper, and it showed general good will on the part of the paper.<sup>24</sup> This rather unimaginative but presumably accurate reply does not reflect the then current precarious state of the book sections of many of the quality papers which was considered in a 1995 *Bookseller* article, under the headline 'Gossip and gloom as Ritchie resigns'. The diminishing level of book coverage in *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Observer*, and *The Guardian* was noted; the only exception to this trend was the Telegraph group, (*The Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, and *The Spectator*), which was thought to be maintaining their 'authoritative' book coverage. The article continued:

The current upheaval seems to reflect the poor light in which books are held by the current generation of newspaper editors and their masters. In an era in which multi-section newspapers are getting fatter, books coverage, particularly reviewing space, is becoming scarcer. Certainly, there is an abundance of author profiles, most of which are deadeningly predictable, and there is sufficient space given over to gossip about advances and authors' earnings, but reviews are fewer - and smaller.<sup>25</sup>

Since literary prizes often generate controversy and comment, thus creating many column inches usually far away from the book pages, there seems little doubt that they will continue to be sponsored by the newspapers, but whether they maintain 'the profile of the paper as being a literary paper' remains open to question.

As the acknowledged primary purpose of literary prizes is to sell books the bigger the contention surrounding a particular prize the bigger the sales. According to Giles Gordon, Martyn Goff, who has been responsible for the Booker prize since its second year, first as director and now as Chairman of the Book Trust, which administers the prize, 'has knowingly stirred the pot each year by appointing judges whose taste is unlikely to coincide with that of the other judges.'<sup>26</sup> It is not only in the world of fiction that this happens. Alan

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<sup>24</sup> Personal telephone conversation, 17 March 1995.

<sup>25</sup> *The Bookseller*, 24 February 1995, p5.

<sup>26</sup> Giles Gordon, *The Times*, 5 November 1994.



Clarke, the writer and MP, who was chairman of the 1995 AT&T non-fiction award judges, claimed that he was 'under no illusion as to why he was asked to be chairman':

They didn't put me in for my taste and discernment in this field. I was put on the committee in the hope that there might be a row, in inverted commas, and that I might be controversial and this would attract publicity to the whole affair.<sup>27</sup>

Clarke went on to make another cogent point in the same interview when he said that 'you can't choose what books you would like to judge, you're at the mercy of the publishers, and what they choose to send you.'

Before publishers submit a book they must know who the judges are, and thus something about their tastes. One small bookseller, interviewed for *The Bookseller*, wondered 'if the judges are chosen from too narrow an electoral college, and if their choice is determined by how it will look to their colleagues in literary and publishing circles'. He then goes on to say: 'There is bound to be an element in the judges' thinking that what they choose is a personal statement and will automatically reflect on them.'<sup>28</sup> Inevitably the perception and assessment of the individual judges will be subjective, therefore the eventual choice is bound to be unpredictable. Graham Sharpe, the William Hill media relations manager, and the only current bookmaker invited to the Booker prize presentation, agreed:

The reason there have been a number of controversial or unexpected winners is because these often emerge as 'compromise' winners when judges are still disagreeing, with the deadline for their announcement fast approaching!

There must also be an element of the judges wishing to be seen to be forming public opinion rather than being influenced by it.<sup>29</sup>

When the publishers are faced with a disparate group of judges, speculation arises about the criteria the publishers employ when making their selection of books to send in for

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<sup>27</sup> Interviewed by Julia Llewellyn Smith for *The Times*, 6 May 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Mike Johnson of Devizes Books, *The Bookseller*, 19 November 1993, p26.

<sup>29</sup> Personal letter, 25 July 1995.

consideration for an award. When it was suggested to Martyn Goff that there may be some sort of collusion among the publishers and the prize sponsors because of the lucrative publishing deals that precede and follow the Booker, he was adamant that 'conspiracy theories' were baseless. He said that the question of commercial advantage never comes up, and in his twenty-six years of dealing with the Booker 'only one judge has been nobbled by a publisher' and this was immediately reported to him.<sup>30</sup>

Harry Ritchie was equally indignant about the same suggestion when it was put to him in March 1995 and summarily dismissed it. However, he was more expansive in June of that year when he outlined his views about literary prizes in general under the connotative headline: 'Literary Prizes, Ha Ha Ha'.<sup>31</sup>

Although the publicity created by the Booker is not uniformly positive - ensured by the time-honoured cock-ups from the judging panel and/or the BBC's live broadcast - even the customary scandals, vilifications and outrage contribute to the profile of the prize and, much more importantly, the profile of contemporary fiction. Which, after all, is the only justification for the Booker's existence, since the notion of a 'best' novel or book of the year is a patent nonsense. (With the winner being selected from a shortlist of five separately categorised books, the Whitbread is even more patently nonsensical.)

The innate daftness of the major literary prizes and the fact that they are assessed by committee mean that predicting their winners is even more futile than most bookish punditry.<sup>32</sup>

Although Ritchie dismissed the idea of commercial advantage in relation to collusion between publishers and prize sponsors the first few words in the quote above immediately bring to mind the very real commercial advantage there is to be had for the publishers and prize sponsors through publicity.

In 1995 David Taylor, the regional manager of Blackwell Retail Limited, also denied any knowledge of underhand deals in the literary prize business. When he was asked by the

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<sup>30</sup> Personal telephone conversation, 17 March 1995.

<sup>31</sup> The 1993 Booker Prize winner was *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle.

<sup>32</sup> *n.b.: the book magazine for librarians*, Vol 1 No 2, London: *n.b.* magazine ltd, June/July 1995, p15.

Booksellers Association<sup>33</sup> to be on the judging panel of the Whitbread prize one year he was not aware that there was a fee paid for his services, although he welcomed the cheque, and he was not given any specific guidelines other than to use his own judgement. He estimated that he spent between twenty and twenty-five hours of his own time on the project.<sup>34</sup> These hardly compare to the hours that John Sutherland implied he worked as one of the judges for the 1999 Booker Prize for which he was paid £3,000.<sup>35</sup> He complained that he was paid the equivalent of £2.70 per hour which means that he gave 1,111.1 hours to the task of reading the 129 books put forward for the prize - 8.6 hours per book.<sup>36</sup>

The Whitbread prize administrator was one of those who ignored the written request for information and in a follow-up telephone conversation was not able to confirm the dates certain writers won prizes or whether or not prize winners were asked to be judges the year following their award. Barbara Trapido, whose novel *Brother of the More Famous Jack* won the Whitbread Special Prize for Fiction in 1982, was on the judging panel for the Whitbread Book of the Year in 1983. Her views are similar to those of Harry Ritchie. To pick the best book from five different genres is an unrealistic task, and she echoed the predominant view that literary prizes are 'not about literary merit, but about compromise'. She knew that her male fellow judges - she considered herself the 'token' woman - would immediately dismiss the poet among the five potential winners because, she said, 'no-one will admit to reading poetry'.<sup>37</sup> In fact, two years later, in 1997, a poet, Seamus Heaney, did win the £21,000 Whitbread Book of the Year with *The Spirit Level*, although the sentiment about poetry appears to have remained the same: the editor of *The Literary Review*, Auberon Waugh,

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<sup>33</sup> The Booksellers Association were involved in the promotion of the prize with the London PR company Coleman Getty,

<sup>34</sup> Personal letter, 27 March 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Young Publishers Association debate, 29 September 1999.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 20 August 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Personal interview, 11 June 1995.

said: 'I'm not a Heaney fan. I'm not very keen on modern poets. Such awards give comfort to those wretched people who sit on poetry societies.'<sup>38</sup>

The subject of women and literary prizes was debated in the trade and national press in 1994 when the Japanese Mitsubishi Pencil Company UK Ltd withdrew its sponsorship for a £30,000 women's literary prize to be known as the UNI prize because they were upset by press criticism that the prize was sexist. Simon Jenkins, writing in *The Times*, began his protest about the institution of such a prize with:

Britain's most valuable prize is to be launched in September. It is to be restricted to women. The prize ... is worth £30,000, making it bigger than the Booker, the NCR [now the AT&T], the W H Smith or the Whitbread. The patrons are all women and the judges are all women. The reason for this discrimination is allegedly a grievance among female writers that too many Booker and other literary prizes go to men.<sup>39</sup>

Nothing in the remaining thirty column inches of the article is likely to persuade readers that the crux of his argument against the prize is not in the first four words of his opening paragraph. His patronising tone is evident when he later suggests better ways for Mitsubishi to spend their money. Among them was : '... give the cash to any woman who makes the Booker shortlist but fails to win, to help her try again.'

After a fair and reasoned reply to Simon Jenkins in which Fay Weldon points out that 'the loudest voices against a literary award solely for women have been raised by men ...' she ends her article with the plea:

In the meantime, please let us not drive Mitsubishi away: discussion and outrage are the marks of a moving and changing society, in which hope resides. Thank you Mitsubishi. You just give us the money: we'll sort out the ideology, and when the problems of gender-in-art have withered away, we'll be in touch to say thank you ...<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *The Times*, 22 January 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Simon Jenkins, *The Times*, 9 July 1994.

<sup>40</sup> Fay Weldon, *The Times*, 10 August 1994.

Despite her plea Mitsubishi was driven away, but in January 1996 Orange, the national digital wire-free phone service, decided to brave media outrage and sponsor the literary prize for women; the only criteria are that the novel is written by a woman in English and that it has been published in the previous year. The annual Orange prize money of £30,000, along with a bronze figurine created by Grizel Niven, known as a 'Bessie',<sup>41</sup> is anonymously endowed, and it was on account of this prize that in July 1997 Orange won the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts/Financial Times Award for First Time Sponsor of the Year. The connection between the two events fosters a certain amount of cynicism but Orange used the publicity surrounding the prize to fund a series of educational initiatives. The first project 'Focus on Fiction' was launched in 1997 and with the backing of the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), a national curriculum compatible resource pack was produced for classroom teachers of English with over three thousand five hundred schools taking up the offer. Later the same year, in conjunction with the National Organisation for Adult Learning, Waterstones Booksellers and *You* magazine, 'Orange Reading Groups' were formed to encourage an informal network of groups getting together to discuss writers and novels, and in 1999 these reading groups are going to be encouraged in the workplace.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to note the change in prize objectives; these initiatives are provoking an interest in reading and books which is of benefit to the whole of the book trade not just for the books and publishers associated with the Orange Prize, but the continuing media sniping about the need, or otherwise, of a fiction prize solely for women, can become wearisome. With so many prize categories available one more with the criterion of being for women only should not be an excuse for misogynist media attention. The author and co-founder of the Orange Prize, Kate Mosse,<sup>43</sup> who was chairman of the Orange Prize judges in 1996,

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<sup>41</sup> Nicknamed 'Bessie' because the Christian name of the anonymous donor is Elizabeth.

<sup>42</sup> [www.orangeprize.com](http://www.orangeprize.com)

<sup>43</sup> Kate Mosse has written several works of non-fiction and two novels. As well as being a

made a valid point when she justified this new category of prize by pointing out that only four women were represented on the Booker shortlist of the previous five years, especially since there were twenty-nine names on the shortlists for those years 1991-5, which gives a particularly poor percentage of representation, which was, of course, her point. But if she had produced the figures prior to those dates and gone back to the start of the Booker, in 1969, and updated her information to 1999 her point would not have been quite so valid because she would have found that overall women have an approximate 30 per cent representation on the winners list, the shortlists, and among the judges. There have been eleven female winners in the thirty-one year history of the Booker, plus another fifty-four shortlisted out of a possible 144, and fifty-nine female judges out of a possible 145 - but only five times has the chairperson been female.

An even better female representation on winners' lists can be found by looking at the thirty-five prize lists in the 1996 edition of *Who Else Writes Like?: A Readers' Guide to Fiction Authors* compiled by Roy and Jeanne Huse.<sup>44</sup> If the Pulitzer Prize, because it is American, is omitted, of the remaining thirty-four prizes there are 180 female writers listed and 503 male, that is 2.79 men for each woman, which suggests, if relevant figures were available, that more women would feature on a 'poverty-stricken' list of authors than men.

Without denying Kate Mosse her justification for a women-only prize these figures are quite good in comparison with female representation on other prize lists in Britain and abroad. For example, in Britain, the Whitbread First Novel Award for the years 1981-98 only four women out of a possible eighteen have won, and the Whitbread Novel Award, 1971-98,

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co-founder and first Administrator of the Orange Prize for Fiction she has served on the Arts for Everyone Panel for the Arts Council of England and is now the Theatre Administrator of Chichester Festival Theatre.

<sup>44</sup> *Who Else Writes Like?: A Readers' Guide to Fiction Authors*, 2nd ed, compiled and edited by Roy and Jeanne Huse, Loughborough University of Technology: LISU, 1996.

eight out of a possible twenty-eight won. In America the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction has been won by women eleven times out of the forty-nine times it has been awarded from 1950-98, and only eight women have won the National Book Award in the same time span. The French literary prize Prix Medicis Etranger awarded by a jury of twelve to novels written in a foreign language has had only two female winners in the years 1970-98 and in Australia the Miles Franklin Award has had only ten female winners out of a possible forty-two in the years 1957-98. The Canadians are slightly better with fourteen female winners of the Governor General's Literary Award from the forty-nine years 1950-98 which includes the two occasions when there was no award given, but the worse record must go to the Nobel Literary Prize selectors who, in the years 1950-99, from my interpretation of foreign names, have only honoured four or five women.<sup>45</sup>

Since the Orange Prize's inception it has been subject to controversy because of the complaints about the low standard of many of the books by British women submitted for consideration, which suggests, perhaps, that the Booker judges do get it right. Professor Lola Young, chairman of the 1999 judges, is quoted in *The Times* as saying that the reason why five out of six shortlisted novels are from North America can be attributed to: 'a cult of big advances going to photogenic young women to write about their own lives and who they had to dinner as if that is all there is to life.'<sup>46</sup> Celia Brayfield responded to this by claiming that the book industry itself must share the responsibility for the so-called lightweight, insular novels:

As a writer who has tried to follow Graham Greene in writing both light and serious novels, I have experienced discouragement - sometimes severe - from attempting serious work. Among British women novelists the opinion is widely held that if Sebastian Faulks were a woman, her editor would have made her cut the First World War out of *Birdsong*.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Figures from *The Modern Library: The 200 best novels in English since 1950* by Carmen Callil and Colm Toibin, London: Picador, 1999.

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 11 May 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to *The Times*, 13 May 1999.

This implies that the book publishing trade, as well as prize giving committees, have misogynistic tendencies or a very low opinion of the writing ability of women.

If the institution of a women's prize is considered sexist, thus causing outrage, it is not surprising that there was a some disquiet in January 1995 following the announcement of the Saga prize for writers living in Britain with black African ancestry, which could be deemed racist. This £3,000 prize, which was to be awarded for four years only, was for an unpublished novel and it was to be published by Virago Press. The Saga Prize was set up by Marsha Hunt to find new black writers because she felt that black writers were under represented in the British book industry and although there are many black American writers with established reputations across a wide spectrum, they do not relate to the experience of being black in Britain.<sup>48</sup> Susan McGregor, then prizes co-ordinator of Book Trust, the administrator of the Saga Prize, wholeheartedly agreed with Hunt and said that since prizes created publicity she hoped that the prize would 'raise the profile of black British writers, and encourage more publishers to explore this market and bridge the gap between "minority interest" books and mainstream fiction.'<sup>49</sup> But the very narrow focus of the prize caused misgivings in some quarters. David Sexton, writing in *The Guardian*, summed it up when he said:

It is thus another dismaying extension of the delegate culture, denying the freedom of the imagination of both writers and readers, which has now made such inroads into so many areas, from gay literature sections to the feminist lists. As a delegate from your minority, you are assumed to be able to speak, even in fiction, only from your position in terms of race, class, sexual orientation, age, and so forth. You are, in short, assumed only to be able to represent, not to imagine. So confident of this are the Saga Prize organisers that they do not bother to mention a theme, as though no black writer could write anything other than an essentially autobiographical novel about being black.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Onyekachi Wambu has helped to refute this statement by editing *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to *The Bookseller*, 7 July 1995.

<sup>50</sup> *The Guardian*, 11 August 1995.



However, it would appear that the sponsors and/or the administrators of the Caine Prize for African Writing have taken note of Sexton's words because their criteria for their prize are not as stringent as those of the Saga. Their definition of African writing includes writers 'whose work has reflected African sensibilities'<sup>51</sup> as well as the writers of African nationality or African parents. Ben Okri has been named as the chairman of the judges, and Nadine Gordimer, Wole Soyinka and Naquib Mahfouz, all African Nobel Prize winners, have been invited to be patrons.<sup>52</sup>

The Saga prize was just one of the many literary prizes to exploit a gap in the publishing market, as well as bringing the company name into wider prominence. Mark Le Fanu, general secretary of the Society of Authors, has summarised succinctly the 1990s' attitude to literary prizes when he referred to it as 'show business':

The more famous sponsored prizes thrive on rows between the judges and on the humiliation of short-listed authors, who dress up for their big night but leave empty-handed while the dazed winner is ushered reverentially into a press conference. That's show business.<sup>53</sup>

Show business, like any other business, is a commercial activity and the publishing business has been assiduous in courting publicity to increase its commercial advantages to offset the expenses they have when they choose to submit books for a prize. For example, two of the David Higham Prize for Fiction entry requirements are: four copies of each entry must be submitted, and when entering a book for the prize the publisher undertakes to pay for a small presentation party. However, the Booker prize requirements are more stringent and are itemised thus:

Any eligible book which is entered for the Prize shall not qualify for the award unless the publisher agrees:  
(a) to spend not less than £1,000 on direct, paid for media advertising of the winning book, including a winning poster or showcard, within the three months following the announcement;

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<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 12 August 1999.

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 24 June 1999.

<sup>53</sup> Mark le Fanu, *The Bookseller*, 16 June 1995, p30.

- (b) to contribute £2,000 towards general publicity if the book reaches the shortlist;
- (c) to comply with Rule 4g (which states that two copies of each shortlisted book in folded and collated form should be retained by the publisher. These must be delivered to a nominated bookbinder for leather binding within 48 hours of the announcement of the shortlist.)<sup>54</sup>

But it is the sponsor, Booker plc, who pays for the presentation at the Guildhall (reputed to cost £500,000),<sup>55</sup> and it is at this point that the general public starts to become aware of the literary prize scene because of the television coverage and, frequently, a follow-up discussion in the press about who should or should not have been awarded the prize.

To have the backing of a wealthy multi-national company is very valuable both to the winners and the publishers; for the authors it means not only the amount of prize money but their subsequent substantial sales leading to bestseller status, and for the publishers greatly increased profits, but not all prize administrators are as lucky. The original 1969 Booker prize 'was launched at a noisy, stand-up drinks party with dud amplification at one of the livery halls'<sup>56</sup> which sounds similar to the 1995 Arthur C Clarke Award ceremony. That affair was held in an unprepossessing upstairs bar where the over-priced drinks had to be paid for, but the presenter, referring to the occasion as 'the peak of the science fiction year' when he presented 'the Clarke' to the winner, Pat Cadigan, for *Fools*,<sup>57</sup> was perhaps hoping that this prize would soon have the cachet of 'the Booker'. Or perhaps not because this award is one of the many specialist ones catering for a particular genre of popular fiction. The judges are from the Science Fiction Foundation, the British Science Fiction Association and the International Science Policy Foundation and the award is an engraved bookend and a cheque for £1,000 donated by Arthur C Clarke.<sup>58</sup> However, unless the national press change

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<sup>54</sup> From the 1995 Booker Prize for Fiction details and rules.

<sup>55</sup> Young Publishers Association debate, 29 September 1999. 'In the beginning, the selection process and the prize were 70% of the costs and the ceremony 30%. Over the years, these proportions have been reversed.' Caine, p9.

<sup>56</sup> W L Webb, *The Times* 'Booker of Bookers' supplement, pIII.

<sup>57</sup> The Arthur C Clarke Award ceremony, 20 April 1995.

<sup>58</sup> Information provided by the Science Fiction Foundation, Liverpool University.

their policy of virtually ignoring the science fiction genre on their review pages 'the Clarke' is unlikely to attract the sort of lavish sponsorship that other prizes do.<sup>59</sup>

Fans of science fiction will have bought Pat Cadigan's prize winning novel because she was lucky enough to have it published. She has been published before and has won a prize before but there is no guarantee that she will be published in the future, although having a prize noted on a book jacket or in the author biography inside the book should ensure that future publishing deals will not be a problem. However, this did not happen for Jill Paton Walsh. She was short-listed for the Booker prize in 1994 but had to publish her short-listed book, *Knowledge of Angels*, herself because her publisher, and many others, rejected it. Yet she had written twenty-two books for children, three of which have won major prizes, and three widely praised adult books. She criticised British publishing for the 'culture of anxiety'<sup>60</sup> but the publishers justified their rejection of the book by saying that it was badly written.<sup>61</sup> Colin Dexter, winner of five Crime Writers' Association prizes,<sup>62</sup> says that it is lack of money that dissuades publishing houses from taking risks. The 'greed' of certain authors means that there is not enough money available to encourage new authors; 'they have to publish sure fire winners to maintain the status quo'.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps Jill Paton Walsh was experiencing a familiar problem for childrens' fiction authors who have changed to adult fiction writing: that of not being taken seriously by adult fiction publishers. Ann Pilling<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> From May 1999, The Science Museum will become one of the sponsors of the Arthur C Clarke Award.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolette Jones, *The Times*, 14 December 1994.

<sup>61</sup> John Sutherland, 'Exceptionally Wonderful Book', *London Review of Books*, 6 October 1994.

<sup>62</sup> There are eight Crime Writers' Association Awards: CWA/Cartier Diamond Dagger Award; CWA Gold Dagger; CWA Silver Dagger; CWA Gold Dagger for Non-Fiction; CWA John Creasey Memorial Award; CWA Last Laugh Award; CWA Golden Handcuffs Award, and CWA/The Macallan Short Story Award. Dexter has won the Silver Dagger and the Gold Dagger twice each and in 1997 he was presented with the Diamond Dagger for outstanding services to crime literature.

<sup>63</sup> Personal interview 2 June 1995.

<sup>64</sup> From a talk given to the Oxford Association of Graduate Women, 2 June 1995.

and Frances Thomas both report similar difficulties, even though, in the case of Frances Thomas, she has won a prize with an adult book, the winning of which she minimised because 'it wasn't one of the big ones'.<sup>65</sup> However, to be nominated or to win a prize, whatever the size, must be psychologically as well as financially rewarding, and to have it emblazoned on the cover of the paperback and/or the next book invariably boosts sales, as a writer in *The Times* book section found when looking at the sales figures of the 1996 Booker nominees.<sup>66</sup>

Thomas, Pilling and Paton Walsh are not common names when examining lists of prize winners but there are names which do appear fairly frequently such as Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine, Salman Rushdie, David Lodge, Colin Dexter, William Boyd, J M Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, Paul Theroux, P D James, Shiva Naipaul, Jeanette Winterson, William McIlvaney, William Trevor, Iris Murdoch, Kingsley Amis, Bruce Chatwin, Hilary Mantel, Piers Paul Read, Rose Tremain and Beryl Bainbridge. The most recurring winning names to appear on any one list are those of Michael Moorcock and Ramsey Campbell who have both won the British Fantasy Award four and six times respectively since 1972.

One has to question whether it is the paucity of fantasy authors or the bias of the judges that causes two names to appear on the British Fantasy Award list so often (or can it simply be attributed to their prodigious output?). Judges are rarely made known to the general public apart from those of the Booker Prize and the Whitbread Book of the Year, and very few of

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<sup>65</sup> Personal interview 11 June 1995. She was one of the runners up in the English language section of the Book of the Year award, sponsored by The Arts Council of Wales in 1987 for her novel *Seeing Things*.

<sup>66</sup> On the 5 October 1996 only two of the shortlisted authors, Margaret Atwood and Beryl Bainbridge, were making any impression on the top 5,000 titles but by the 26 October two more, Seamus Deane and Rohinton Mistry, were there. Atwood also had two other books in the top 5,000. *The Times*, 5 & 26 October 1996.

the other prize administrators contacted provided information about their judges. The Nobel Foundation was one that did:

The right to nominate candidates for the prize-competition shall be enjoyed by members of the Swedish Academy and of other academies, institutions and societies which are similar to it in constitution and purpose; by professors of literature and of linguistics at universities and university colleges; by previous Nobel Prize laureates for literature and by presidents of those societies of authors that are representative of the literary production in their respective countries.<sup>67</sup>

The Crime Writers' Association judges are usually doctors, policemen, and 'other experts' who are not specified in their information sheet. The Ian St James Awards, which are for short stories, use journalists, writers, booksellers, literary editors, actresses, broadcasters, publishers and film producers on their judging panels. The James Tait Black Memorial Prize however is adjudicated by the Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh which immediately suggests that a literary novel will win, probably written by an author such as one of those listed above. Presumptions are made about the choices of the Booker Prize panel in the same way since its judges lists are liberally sprinkled with the titled, academics and the authors who win the literary prizes and there is no doubt, as can be seen from the quotation above, that the Nobel Foundation too, honour their own. Conceivably, these are the types of judges Graham Sharpe was thinking about when he referred to some as: 'wishing to be seen to be forming public opinion rather than being influenced by it.'

If the Booker judges were trying to form public opinion in 1994 with their choice of winner, *How Late It Was, How Late* by James Kelman, they certainly did not form a favourable opinion. The book was criticised for its foul language - Rabbi Julia Neuberger said that it was a disgrace to honour a novel that was not only inaccessible but obscene<sup>68</sup> and it prompted literary figures, such as Giles Gordon, to suggest that the time had come for

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<sup>67</sup> From the booklet *Statutes of the Nobel Foundation* provided by them, 24 March 1995.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in an article by Jason Cowley, *The Times*, 29 October 1996.

Booker to stop promoting its literary prize.<sup>69</sup> The then chairman of Booker McConnell, Sir Michael H Caine, retaliated by saying that 'these days literary editors seem united by their common dislike of literature'.<sup>70</sup> Sir Kingsley Amis took the argument further and said: 'I wonder whether it's time to call a halt with book prizes'. In an interview on Radio 4's *Today* programme he went on:

There's probably a case for cutting down on the number of awards. It damages those good second-rate writers who will never sell more than 5,000 or 10,000 of their books but on whom the whole thing depends, really, by taking the attention away from them and putting it on the winners. It's a bad thing for them and a bad thing for literature. The time has come to wonder if the popularisation of literature has gone far enough.<sup>71</sup>

It is doubtful whether anyone of the authors, publishers, booksellers or publicists in the literary prize winning business agreed with this controversial statement, but it certainly added to Al Senter's 'mounds of press cuttings [and] anecdotal feedback'. But Amis was making a serious point related to author poverty: the more money spent on publicity for the very few that win prizes, the less there is for those who do not.

The initial quotation from Al Senter also referred to the lack of 'market research carried out into the impact of book prizes on the public' yet it is the public who buy the books, often as a result of the publicity surrounding the literary prize winners and it is the public who ask for these books in the public library. Book research companies collect and collate these sales figures each week and produce best sellers' lists for the national and trade press, and it is from these figures, and the PLR ones, that it is possible to assess, albeit minimally, the impact of book prizes on the public. To see the prize winning books at the top of the bestseller lists usually indicates large sales figures which generally means that the book buying public has been affected in some way by the media hype.

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<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 5 November 1994.

<sup>70</sup> Nicolette Jones, *The Times*, 14 December 1994.

<sup>71</sup> Mike Ellison, *The Guardian*, 14 June 1995.

Whether it was the publicity over the Booker Prize shortlist or as a result of the published bestseller lists some interesting results were generated by a television company survey. Channel 4 conducted a survey in book shops and on the Internet during the run up to the 1999 Booker Prize announcement and they found that 30 per cent of those surveyed read more than forty books a year and 11 per cent more than one hundred; 67 per cent prefer general fiction; 58 per cent regard the Booker as relevant, and, 28 per cent would go out of their way to read the Booker Prize winner. When asked to nominate their book of the year they placed *Disgrace* by John Coetzee in third place, *Headlong* by Michael Frayn in second place, and in first place *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* by J K Rowling<sup>72</sup>- yet another remarkable achievement for a book that started out as one for children.<sup>73</sup>

There is, perhaps, one type of prize whose impact on the public it might be hard to assess; the one that comes without any cheque for the winner, or list of expenses for the publisher; the one, for example, announced from Buckingham Palace in June 1995, the OBE for Kazuo Ishiguro for his services to literature - although there is bound to be someone with access to the press who suggests the honour should have gone to someone else, thus producing publicity, which translates into sales, which is what the literary prize business is all about.

One event that really celebrates 'what the literary business is all about' is the annual British Book Awards, first started in 1990, to toast the achievements of the commercial arm of the book trade. In the late 1980s, when the book publishing industry was at a low ebb because so many publishing houses were being sold and job losses were on an unprecedented scale, Fred Newman, publisher and Editor of *Publishing News*, decided that it was time to

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<sup>72</sup> Channel 4, 25 October 1999,

<sup>73</sup> Although the Harry Potter books were originally published for children subsequent printings have had new cover designs for the adult market. Childrens' books are not eligible for the Booker Prize.

acknowledge all the people who worked so hard behind the scenes rather than just the big-name authors.<sup>74</sup> The Awards are organised by *Publishing News* and the award winners are presented with king-size, gold-coloured, imitation pen nibs, commonly referred to as 'Nibbies'. They are presented to some authors but most of the awards go to the people involved in the business of book production: editors, publishers, book shops and their staff, representatives, printers, illustrators, designers, and production staff. Nomination forms are printed in *Publishing News* and *The Bookseller* and anyone in the trade is allowed to nominate in any or all of the different categories. The winners are selected by an 'Academy' of more than 100 people working in the book trade - some of whom may win the prizes. Many of the prizes are sponsored by interested companies. In 1998 KPMG sponsored the Publisher of the Year (Random House), the book printer Butler and Tanner sponsored the Book of the Year (*Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding), the Author of the Year was sponsored by Securicor Omega Express (Louis de Bernières) and Ken Follett sponsored the Editor of the Year (Liz Calder).<sup>75</sup>

Before a prize or award or a bursary can be given a book has to be written and how to write a literary prize winning novel was demonstrated during the television presentation of the 1999 Booker Prize when there was a spoof interlude entitled 'How to Write a Winner'. An 'anonymous (male) critic' was asked if there was anything distinctive about the sort of book that tends to win the Booker Prize. He came up with eight points:

Try to be foreign - 13 previous winners were non-British; try to be historical; try to be warlike - war stories have a habit of doing well; don't be too experimental - the critics panned *The Bone People*; make sure you have a big theme like the Holocaust or death; don't write Science Fiction, Thrillers, Crime Fiction, or Romances; try to be a famous writer who has been inexplicably overlooked in the past; try not to be Beryl Bainbridge who has been inexplicably overlooked five times - 1973, 1974, 1990, 1996, and 1998. So, overall, try to be a foreign writer, with a not too experimental book featuring a war in an exotic setting and get a few big themes in - in fact just try to be Salman Rushdie.

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<sup>74</sup> Liz Thomson, 'Nibbies make their mark', *The Times*, 6 February 1998.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 6 February 1998.



Salman Rushdie does win prizes, and there was a lot of criticism of the 1999 Booker Prize judges because they failed even to shortlist his latest book, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*,<sup>76</sup> but this spoof has some truth in it and that is partly why the 'gang of British novelists and publishers' deemed the Booker Prize dull in 1999. But if its dullness leads to discussions about all aspects of literature then it has fulfilled an important function. Kingsley Amis may have felt that we have enough prizes and awards, but for the winners, especially of the less well publicised prizes, they are an acknowledgement that their writing is not being ignored; they give encouragement, and, in some cases, lift the authors out of the poverty trap although not necessarily into the bestseller lists.

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<sup>76</sup> He won the Booker Prize with *Midnight's Children* in 1981. He was short-listed for the prize in 1983 (*Shame*), 1988 (*The Satanic Verses*), and 1995 (*The Moor's Last Sigh*).

## CHAPTER 4

### *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

In the next four chapters I am going to look at four distinctly different books, one for each of the decades covered, that have individually contributed in some way to the changing nature of the popular fiction publishing trade and provide vivid illustration of how bestsellerdom is created. All four are bestsellers, and as a result three of their authors are not among those with below average earnings, but the fourth author, D H Lawrence, who was, by his standards, poverty stricken at times died before his bestseller status materialised. The first choice of book, and the one that has posthumously greatly enriched Lawrence's estate, is the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which was finally officially published in Britain in 1960 thirty-two years after it was described thus:

There has been brought to our notice within the last few weeks a book which we have no hesitation in describing as the most evil outpouring that has ever besmirched the literature of our country. The sewers of French pornography would be dragged in vain to find a parallel in beastliness. The creations of muddled-minded perverts, peddled in the back-street bookstalls of Paris are prudish by comparison. The book is by one of the best known of modern English novelists, Mr D. H. Lawrence. It is entitled *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.<sup>1</sup>

On 10 November 1960 the first complete, unexpurgated edition of D H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* went on sale to the general public in Great Britain after it was officially published by Penguin Books Ltd following obscenity trials in the USA and England. On 11 November *The Times* reported the phenomenal first day's sales figures and commented that experienced booksellers 'had never known anything like this demand before'.<sup>2</sup> Two million

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<sup>1</sup> *John Bull*, 28 October 1928, quoted in Steve Hare, ed., *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995. p236.

<sup>2</sup> The same was probably said of Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) 'which had an initial sale greater than any previous novel, bestowing upon it the (largely symbolic) title of the first best-seller in British history.' Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. p26.

Q D Leavis also refers to the huge sales figures of best selling popular authors in general (p47) and Florence Barclay (*The Rosary*, 1909) in particular (Note 40, p63). *Fiction and the Reading Public*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1968. First published 1932.

copies were sold in the six weeks up to Christmas 1960 and a further 1.3 million copies during 1961 making *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the best selling Penguin, thus outselling the previous favourite, E V Rieu's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, published in 1946.<sup>3</sup> Twenty years later John Sutherland referred to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as 'the best selling novel ever in the UK' in his book *Best Sellers: Popular fiction of the 1970s*<sup>4</sup>, and Jay A Gertzman claims: 'that *Lady Chatterley* may be the most pirated 20th-century novel in English'.<sup>5</sup>

Almost forty years later no one would be surprised by those sales figures - notoriety and hype are now familiar tools of the publishing trade, but in 1928 when Lawrence struggled to get the first edition of his novel published, social mores were not what they are today. Society in Britain in the early part of the twentieth century was rigidly class based and very prudish about sexual matters and as a result of the 1926 General Strike there had been a hardening of attitudes to anything the authorities considered subversive or threatening to the cultural status quo. Thus it was inevitable that Lawrence's views on sex and the class system as portrayed in his writings (and paintings) would lead to them being banned by those who put themselves in charge of the country's moral health. No one but a fool or a martyr would have tried to bring out the untrimmed *Chatterley* in England....In 1930 a...reckless businessman would have been breaking stones for years.<sup>6</sup> As late as 1955 a retailer was imprisoned for two months for handling *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.<sup>7</sup>

D H Lawrence was a prolific writer but *Lady Chatterley's Lover* remains his most well-known book due, in part, to the reason Lawrence gave for writing it: 'I want men and

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<sup>3</sup> [www.penguin.co.uk](http://www.penguin.co.uk)

<sup>4</sup> John Sutherland, *Best Sellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. p35.

<sup>5</sup> Jay A Gertzman, 'The Piracies of "Lady Chatterley's Lover": 1928-1950', *The D H Lawrence Review*, Fall 1987, Vol 19 (3). p268.

<sup>6</sup> John Sutherland, *Offensive Literature: Decensorship in Britain 1960-1882*, London: Junction Books, 1982. p10.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*.

women to be able to think sex, fully, completely, honestly, and cleanly.<sup>8</sup> The entry under the novel's title in the Margaret Drabble edited version of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* gives little indication of Lawrence's aims:

Constance Chatterley is married to Sir Clifford, a writer, intellectual, and landowner, of Wragby Hall in the Midlands. He is confined to a wheelchair through injuries from the First World War. She has an unsatisfying affair with a successful playwright, Michaelis, followed by a passionate love relationship with gamekeeper Oliver Mellors, son of a miner and ex-officer from the Indian army. She becomes pregnant by him, goes to Venice with her sister Hilda partly to obscure the baby's parentage, but returns and tells her husband the truth, spurred on by the knowledge that Mellor's estranged wife Bertha has been stirring scandal in an effort to reclaim him. The novel ends with the temporary separation of the lovers, as they hopefully await divorce and a new life together.<sup>9</sup>

Lawrence's desire to write openly and honestly about sexual relations was to be only part of a novel in which he was to attack the desecration of the countryside, the class system and the cynicism of the business world, but the mere thirty pages out of 300 devoted to the affair between Mellors and Connie and his use of four-letter words have almost eclipsed any other consideration of the novel. His advocacy of freedom for women is evident from very early on and he had interesting ideas about the future 'when babies would be bred in bottles and women would be "immunised"' (p74).<sup>10</sup> He was concerned about the poor quality of the air around the coal mining districts where even 'the sheep coughed' (p41), and the picture he painted of the coal miners 'trailing from the pits, grey-black, distorted, one shoulder higher than the other, slurring their heavy ironshod boots' (p159) is in sharp contrast to that of 'the Lido with its acres of sun-pinked or pyjamaed bodies' (p258). His vivid descriptions of colours associated with Venetian sunshine and good living are rarely applied to any part of the Midlands, but he occasionally surprises the reader with 'the yellow glitter' of the crowded

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<sup>8</sup> D H Lawrence, 'A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"', published with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Cambridge University Press edition: first published 1993, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994. p308. Originally published 1928.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. p542.

<sup>10</sup> D H Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994. Cambridge University Press edition, first published 1993. Originally published 1928. All page number references apply to this edition.

celandines, the 'lace work of half-open leaves' of the hazel-thicket, 'the lush dark green of hyacinths', the 'ink-purple ruches' of the columbines and the fluffed up forget-me-nots (p165), in the woods near Mellor's hut.

'I hate the impudence of money and I hate the impudence of class' (p276) says Mellors in Lawrence's voice and Lawrence shows his concern for the future of mankind after a speech about the futility of war when he has Mellors say: 'I tell you, every generation breeds a more rabbit generation, with indiarubber tubing for guts and tin legs and tin faces' (p217), with their worship of money and the 'bitch goddess' success (p62). But he is perhaps foreseeing the furore over the content of the book when he says:

It's the one thing they won't let you be, straight and open in your sex. You can be as dirty as you like. In fact the more dirt you do on sex, the better they like it. But if you believe in your own sex, and won't have it done dirt to: they'll down you. It's the one insane taboo left: sex as a natural and vital thing. (p264)

Many scholars have written about D H Lawrence and about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in particular, and if one wants to study it in any detail, especially with reference to the passages that offended certain sections of society, then reading the trial transcript will inform the reader on all aspects of that novel as well as give an overall idea of Lawrence's thoughts and intentions as he was writing it since many of the Lawrence experts were invited to give their opinions at the obscenity trial which followed Penguin Books announcement that they were going to publish the unexpurgated edition. And it soon became evident that the trial was going to be one of conflict between generation and class. The class system is often associated with having or not having money and in the trial of *Lady Chatterley* it became a question of who had the right to buy the book: those using their salaries to buy the hardback version or those using their pay to buy the paperback version.

D H Lawrence began drafting *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in Italy in October 1926, the year of the General Strike in England, but was dissatisfied with the first draft and began a second

version in December of that year. Despite increasing illness he started the third and final version in November 1927 and from his essays it is presumed that he finished it on 8 January 1928.<sup>11</sup> His regular publishers, Martin Secker in England and Alfred A Knopf in America, were not prepared to publish the book unless it was expurgated. Lawrence would not accept their conditions and did his own copy-editing, designing, and proofreading, and, with the help of his friend "Pino" Orioli, a Florentine bookseller, he published the book privately in the summer of 1928. Together they distributed hundreds of copies by mail although many of them were confiscated by custom authorities. Because he did not have copyright, (a writer could not establish copyright if the work was considered indecent), many pirated editions of his book were printed thus depriving him of any profits, but he eventually countered this piracy by publishing an inexpensive edition in Paris in May 1929. In 1932 Secker and Knopf published expurgated editions which ensured copyright and profits for Lawrence's heirs.

There appears to be some misunderstanding about the laws of copyright and how they applied to this particular novel. Gerald Pollinger, the Literary Executor for the estate of Frieda Lawrence Ravagli, says of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that: 'When the book, any book, was published in those days, there was no copyright law, Berne, Geneva, or Universal, to acknowledge. So publishers of a book, any book, just put something like "First published", and the date, if they put anything at all.'<sup>12</sup> He also says that the reason why the novel was not copyrighted in Britain is because the unexpurgated edition was not published until 10 November 1960. However, The Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd when asked for clarification with particular reference to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* said:

There was a Copyright Act in 1911, therefore books did have copyright in 1928. The common law does admit a defence of 'Unfair Dealing', which is not mentioned in the Act. 'When a work is made which is a copy of another which is itself obscene, immoral, blasphemous or (probably) defamatory, then the owner of the copyright in the original work is powerless to prevent such infringement by copyright law. This is because

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Squires and Dennis Jackson, eds., *D H Lawrence's "Lady"*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985. pIX.

<sup>12</sup> Gerald Pollinger, personal letter, 22 January 1999.

the courts refuse to do anything which is tantamount to acknowledging the plaintiff's right to control the possession or distribution of any work which is of such an undesirable nature as to be undeserving of the law's protection.' (*Whale on Copyright: 4th ed; Phillips, Durie and Karet.*)<sup>13</sup>

David Saunders, in his book *Authorship and Copyright*,<sup>14</sup> goes into more detail about cases 'rare but historically real ... where copyright protection is withheld from works deemed obscene or immoral, even though this obscenity or immorality is not proven in a criminal sense' and he quotes various court proceedings where this has happened. Thus Lawrence must have known that he would not get copyright for his unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* through the experiences he had had with some of his previous works, for example *The Rainbow*, and, therefore, any complaints of piracy were less than honest.

The need to make money appears, from his letters to his friends, to have been the prime consideration when deciding on the publishing tactics in relation to his novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Prior to 1928 Lawrence had had periods of relative financial success as a writer writing poems, travel essays and short stories to supplement his income from his novels. In 1914 his then literary agent, J B Pinker, had arranged a three-novel contract with the publisher Methuen which entitled him to £300 in advance royalties for each book, following the success of *Sons and Lovers* in 1913. However, the first world war years were difficult ones for the book trade and especially so for Lawrence. The publication of his novel *The Rainbow* was postponed but after being published by Methuen in September 1915; it was suppressed at the end of October, and prosecuted and banned in November. In 1917 his novel *Women in Love* was rejected by publishers and for the rest of the war period, his letters make many references to his poverty and the appeals he had to make to friends and charities for financial assistance.

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<sup>13</sup> The Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, personal letter, 4 February 1999.

<sup>14</sup> David Saunders, *Authorship and Copyright*, London: Routledge, 1992. p215.

His move to America in 1922 re-established his reputation as a professional writer and the American publisher Thomas Seltzer published *Women in Love*, which helped provide Lawrence with a larger regular income than he had previously enjoyed. Seltzer continued to publish all of Lawrence's books and by 1923 Lawrence had no pressing financial worries and was able to travel and live as he liked, as well as being able to send money back to his family in England. However, in 1925, following Lawrence's return to England, Seltzer's publishing firm collapsed and Lawrence's income from royalties gradually dwindled to nothing, thereby forcing him to ask his new American publisher, Knopf, for an advance on his latest novel *St Mawr*. Thus, by 1928, when Lawrence had completed the third and final version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the need to make money was paramount. He had discussed the idea of privately publishing the novel in Italy with his friend S S Koteliensky in a letter dated 22 November 1927,<sup>15</sup> but it is in his early 1928 letters that more explicit details on costs and hoped for profits are discussed, and the suggestion that the novel be re-christened *Tenderness*. On 12 February 1928 in a letter to the Honourable Dorothy Brett he is referring to the novel as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* again, which becomes the final title - although in his letters to Martin Secker, his English publisher (5 March), E D McDonald (9 March), and Witter Bynner (13 March) he refers to the novel as *John Thomas and Lady Jane*. Subsequently there were three different versions of the novel in print: *The First Lady Chatterley*, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Although Lawrence's pronounced aim was to make money from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he was very wary of adverse publicity and wrote to Koteliensky in November 1927: 'don't mention it, will you, among people' (22 November), and to Catherine Carswell in January 1928 he wrote: 'Please don't talk about it to anybody - I don't want a scandal advertisement' (10 January). He appeared to be aware that that would happen because he referred to the

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<sup>15</sup> Harry T Moore, ed., *The Collected Letters of D H Lawrence*, Vol 2, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1970. First published 1962.



novel in letters as 'very shocking' (12 December 1927) and 'it's the most improper novel ever written' (23 December 1927). However, he did make money with the novel and six months before he died in 1930 he wrote to a friend and said: 'I am not short of money, *Lady C.* made me over £1000 last year' (9 September 1929), but as he died intestate it was his wife, Frieda, who later became Frieda Ravagli, and her new family who really gained financially from *Lady C.*<sup>16</sup>

'Reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover* seems to have been a pre-1960 rite of passage for anyone professing literary sophistication' says John Sutherland, in his book *Offensive Literature: Decensorship in Britain, 1960-1982*,<sup>17</sup> but the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was not legally available in Britain or America until 1960 following obscenity trials in both countries. In America, Barney Rosset, proprietor of Grove Press, decided to publish the novel following the Roth case in 1957. This established that literary material which was *prima facie* obscene might be published if it could be argued that it was of 'redeeming social importance'.<sup>18</sup> Grove Press had secured a large book-club deal for the novel which meant that copies would be sent to customers by mail. Soon after publication the American Post Office seized four cartons of the books and prosecuted Grove Press for sending obscene material through the mail. Grove Press was found guilty but appealed against the decision and brought a suit against the Postmaster to prevent him banning the use of the mail service. On 21 July 1959 Judge Bryan decided that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was not obscene but the Government similarly appealed against that decision. However, on 26 March 1960 the Court of Appeals upheld Bryan with the verdict 'this is a major and distinguished novel, and Lawrence one of the great writers of the age'.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Preston, Associate Director, D H Lawrence Centre, University of Nottingham, personal emails, 20 and 22 January 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Sutherland, *Offensive Literature*, p11.

<sup>18</sup> Sutherland, *ibid.*, p13.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

The prosecution in Britain of Penguin Books for the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 was the second case to be brought before the courts under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. (The first case concerned a work called *The Ladies Directory*). H. Montgomery Hyde, in his 1989 introduction to the trial,<sup>20</sup> states: '(The trial)...remains the most sensational of its kind since the Act reached the statute book over thirty years ago'. For Sir Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books, the idea of book publishing causing sensations was not new. He had started his career in publishing with a distant cousin who had been jointly responsible for publishing *The Yellow Book*<sup>21</sup> at the end of the previous century under the imprint of The Bodley Head, and it was Lane who had risked prosecution by publishing James Joyce's *Ulysses* in Britain in 1936.<sup>22</sup>

There had been several prosecutions for obscenity after the Second World War and following five such prosecutions in 1954 the Society of Authors took the lead in calling for a reform of the law. It set up a committee under the chairmanship of its President, A P Herbert, with members consisting of authors, critics, journalists, publishers and printers. Norman St. John-Stevas, the future Conservative Minister, was given the task of drafting a reform bill. Private Members Bills based on his draft were introduced in the Commons by Roy Jenkins and Lord Lambton but very little progress was made. However, when A P Herbert threatened to seek re-election to Parliament as an Independent on an Obscene Publications Bill ticket the Government found time for the Bill, and after many delays and bargaining over the amendments the Obscene Publications Act 1959 was passed in August of that year.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> H Montgomery Hyde, ed., *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited*, London: Bodley Head, 1990. p1.

<sup>21</sup> So called because of its distinctive yellow binding which was decorated by Aubrey Beardsley, this was a literary and art periodical which ran from 1894 to 1897 published by John Lane and edited by Henry Harland, and considered decadent and shocking.

<sup>22</sup> J E Morpurgo, *Allen Lane: King Penguin*, London: Hutchinson, 1979. p75.

<sup>23</sup> Montgomery Hyde, p10.

The 1959 Act repealed the 1857 Act and the new test for obscenity was defined as:

For the purposes of this Act an article shall be deemed to be obscene if its effect or (where the article comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it.<sup>24</sup>

Under this new Act, expert witnesses can be called to justify the publication, even if it is *prima facie* obscene, by giving evidence as to its literary, artistic, scientific or other merits. This is what Gerald Gardiner QC, did when he led the defence team during the trial of Penguin Books Ltd. in 1960. One valuable safeguard in the 1857 Act was not incorporated into the 1959 Act. Under the old Act police could only search premises if there was evidence of obscene articles being sold but under the new Act the *suspicion* of having obscene materials on the premises was sufficient reason for the police to take action. The police were now free to enter private or academic libraries which often contain books which would be considered obscene if publicly circulated.

At a Board meeting on 21 January 1960<sup>25</sup> the decision to publish an unexpurgated paperback edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was made because Lane said: 'What we hoped to do this year was to round off the collection of D H Lawrence which we had started in 1950, and we felt *Lady Chatterley* was a book which it was essential should be included if we were in fact going to round off this group.'<sup>26</sup> Lane later explained why he felt the time was

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<sup>24</sup> T R Fitzwalter and Marston Garsia, *Archbold Criminal Pleading, Evidence and Practice in Criminal Cases*, London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1962. p1484.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Rubinstein's papers (DM 1819) and The Penguin Archive (DM 1613), at Bristol University. Permission to look at these papers was given to me by Andrew Rosenheim, Managing Director, Penguin Press. Special thanks to Hannah Lowery, the Archivist at Bristol University Library, for her help.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Preston, who is working on a chronology of DHL in Penguin, disputes the 1950 date in this quote. He says that in August 1944 *Sea and Sardinia* was published; October 1945, *The Prussian Officer*; December 1948, *Sons and Lovers*; February 1949, *The Rainbow*, and in March 1950 Penguin published Lawrence as a 'Penguin million': 100,000 copies each

particularly opportune: 'This year, the fact that the new Act was now on the Statute Book and that there had been a trial in America decided us this was a book we should now do',<sup>27</sup> and it was a way of commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of Penguin Books, the seventy-fifth anniversary of Lawrence's birth and the thirtieth anniversary of his death. J E Morpurgo, in his book *Allen Lane: King Penguin*,<sup>28</sup> says that Lane considered that a prosecution was 'unthinkable' because he believed that public opinion since the war had become more liberal, and the fact that Mr Justice Stable had allowed the publication of Stanley Kauffmann's *The Philanderer* in 1954 had added to this opinion. When Penguin published the first paperback edition of *The Philanderer* they added Mr Justice Stable's summing up in the 1954 trial at the end of the text:

I do not suppose there is a decent man or woman in this court who does not wholeheartedly believe that pornography, filthy books, ought to be stamped out and suppressed. They are not literature ... But in our desire for a healthy society, if we drive the criminal law too far, further than it ought to go, is there not a risk that there will be a revolt, a demand for a change in the law, so that the pendulum will swing too far the other way and allow to creep in things that under the law as it exists today we can exclude and keep out? Members of the jury, that is all I have to say to you. Remember what I said when I began. You are dealing with a criminal charge. This is not a question of what you think is a desirable book to read. It is a criminal charge of publishing a work with a tendency to corrupt and deprave those into whose hands it may fall. Before you return a verdict of 'Guilty' on that charge you have to be satisfied, and each one of you has to be satisfied, that that charge has been proved. If it is anything short of that, the accused companies and individual are entitled to a verdict at your hands of 'Not Guilty'. Members of the jury, will you consider your verdict?<sup>29</sup>

Another point about the 1959 Obscene Publications Act was that it stated that a book had to be 'taken as a whole' and not in isolated passages before it could be condemned, and a book could not be convicted if it were proved that publication 'is justified as being for the public

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of ten titles to mark twentieth anniversary of his death: *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *Etruscan Places*, *The Lost Girl*, *St Mawr* and *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *The Woman Who Rode Away*, *Selected Essays*, *Selected Letters* and *Selected Poems*. R Aldington's *D H Lawrence: An Appreciation* accompanies the set. In August 1950 *The White Peacock* is published. (Personal letter 29 June 1999).

<sup>27</sup> C H Rolph, ed., *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961. p142.

<sup>28</sup> Morpurgo, p315.

<sup>29</sup> Steve Hare, ed., *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995. p234/5.

good on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern' (Section 4:1).<sup>30</sup> Thus, with D H Lawrence texts then on many school examination syllabuses, and four-letter words being printed by reputable publishers in acceptable texts, Penguin Books' legal advisers, Rubinstein, Nash and Co.,<sup>31</sup> agreed that the new Act would protect them effectively. However, in a letter to A S B Glover of Penguin Books on 10 March 1960, Rubinstein wrote:

If ... a jury were to find the publishers guilty at a trial ... I cannot believe that the Court would do more than impose a nominal fine (although the costs of defending the proceedings and especially of defending them unsuccessfully, would certainly be very substantial). There could be, I think, no question of prison sentences for the Directors of your Company or anyone else concerned with the publication.<sup>32</sup>

The usual procedure in a case involving obscene publications is for the Director of Public Prosecutions to instruct the police to buy a copy of the suspect book from a book shop which therefore means that the bookseller can become the defendant. Since the bookseller is unlikely to be able to afford the costs involved with litigation, he/she prefers to plead guilty with the result that the offending book is withdrawn everywhere. Penguin, however, decided to avoid this sequence of events and kept all their copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in their warehouses while waiting for the Attorney General, Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller, to decide whether or not to prosecute. When the decision to prosecute was made Penguin invited the police to collect twelve copies of the novel from their offices in Holborn, thus avoiding the prosecution of a particular bookseller.

Roger Hutchinson, in his book *High Sixties: The Summers of Riot and Love*, suggests that the reason why Penguin Books was prosecuted was because no bribe was paid to the police. This practice of paying graft, in relation to pornographic material, Hutchinson says, 'was

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<sup>30</sup> Fitzwalter Butler and Garsia, p1484.

<sup>31</sup> This was history repeating itself: Michael Rubinstein's father Harold defended the Pegasus Press over its publication of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928.

<sup>32</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

apparent to most radical or even liberal publishers, to many journalists, and to anybody with a sceptical eye on the times'. But this did not become common knowledge until 1977 'when 12 of Soho's finest policemen were jailed for a total of 84 years for, according to the judge, an evil conspiracy which had turned the Obscene Publications Squad into a vast protection racket.'<sup>33</sup> Hutchinson goes on to say that the trial was not so much 'a trial of Lady Constance Chatterley for committing adultery with a lover who used four-letter words' but 'as the trial of Sir Allen Lane for not paying graft.'<sup>34</sup>

However, Morpurgo, when writing his book, believed that the reason why the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was brought to the attention of the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions initially was because the printing firm contracted to manufacture the book, Hazell, Watson & Viney, refused to go ahead with the work because of shop floor protests, and by the time another printing company, Western Printing Services Ltd of Bristol, was found it was too late to meet the publishing date previously announced. Therefore Penguin was forced to advertise the postponement in the trade press.<sup>35</sup> Lane was aware that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* printed in a cheap edition would cause a stir, although he had not expected it from the printers, and had ordered the initial print run to be doubled to 200,000 copies and these were all awaiting distribution following what was expected to be an unsuccessful prosecution of Penguin Books. Among all the questions that Rubinstein was prepared to be asked about the book there was one about the size of the print run and his planned reply was: 'Its size was determined by the size of such orders and not by virtue of any supposed 'sensational' quality of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.' Then there was a note added

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<sup>33</sup> Roger Hutchinson, *High Sixties: The Summers of Riot and Love*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 1992. p22.

<sup>34</sup> Hutchinson, p26.

<sup>35</sup> Morpurgo, p316.

in brackets: ('Although large it is less than aggregate printings for some of the other novels and first printings of other novels where large pre-publication orders have been received.')

<sup>36</sup>

Two days after the summons had been served on Penguin Books, on 21 August 1960 *The Sunday Times* had considered publishing *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, an essay by D H Lawrence, but on the advice of Mr Helenus Milmo they had not published it 'because of the danger that its publication after the issue of the said summons would constitute contempt of Court'.<sup>37</sup>

One of several anomalies associated with the trial was that there was no 'prisoner at the Bar'. Mr Hans Schmoller, the most junior director of Penguin Books Ltd, who had been delegated to hand the twelve copies of the novel to the police thus tacitly accepting the responsibility for publishing the book, and Sir Allen Lane sat in the well of the court with their solicitors. According to Morpurgo, Lane 'was conveniently absent in Spain' when the police called at their offices hence Schmoller's role,<sup>38</sup> but Steve Hare, who edited the book *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970*, tells a different story. He says that it was Sir William Emrys Williams, of Penguin Books, who handed the books to Police Inspector Monahan, but, as Schmoller recorded in his deposition:

... Shortly after the departure of the two Scotland Yard officers Sir William began to have misgivings about his having been the person who was recorded to have handed the book to Inspector Monahan. He said this might cause trouble at the Arts Council, whose Secretary General he was. He telephoned Inspector Monahan in my [Schmoller's] presence and asked him to substitute my name for his (Sir William's) in the official record. Inspector Monahan accepted his request.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult to believe that the trial was anything other than a formality, albeit a very expensive one, when the transcript of the trial is studied in the 1990s because it was known

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<sup>36</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>37</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>38</sup> Morpurgo, p317.

<sup>39</sup> Hare, p241.

that the prosecution had been unable to find any witnesses prepared to say that publication was not justified within the terms of the 1959 Act.<sup>40</sup> In Montgomery-Hyde's introduction to the trial transcript, he says that five members of the jury 'read the oath with some hesitancy at having to read aloud, but the remaining seven appeared fluent readers', which appears to cast aspersions on some members of the jury's ability to read and comprehend the text being tried. The twelve members of the jury came from a list of twenty-six names along with their occupations; of the three female jurors two had no occupation listed and the third was a teacher; and of the nine male jurors two had no occupation listed and the other seven were a radio dealer, instrument maker, cabinet maker, works manager, designer, timber salesman, and valuation surveyor.<sup>41</sup> Montgomery-Hyde goes on to say: 'it is known that from the beginning and throughout the trial until the last day, the jury in this case were nine to three in favour of an acquittal, which meant that the majority thought that the prosecution should not have been brought'.<sup>42</sup> Montgomery-Hyde reinforces the class consciousness of the trial insinuated by his disparaging view of the jurors competency by quoting part of the prosecuting Counsel, Mervyn Griffith-Jones', ill-conceived, and now well-known, opening statement to the jury of ordinary men and women:

You may think that one of the ways in which you can test this book, and test it from the most liberal outlook, is to ask yourselves the question, when you have read it through, would you approve of your young sons, young daughters - because girls can read as well as boys - reading this book? Is it a book you would have lying around in your own house? Is it a book you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?

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Gerald Gardiner QC, for the defence, picked up on these class conscious undertones when he made reference to Griffith-Jones' rather long-winded efforts to define the precise meaning

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<sup>40</sup> Home Office files and papers belonging to the Director of Public Prosecutions relating to this case are due to be kept secret until 2030 under the hundred-year rule.

<sup>41</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Montgomery Hyde, p15.

<sup>43</sup> Montgomery Hyde, p17.



of tendency, as in the 'tendency to deprave and corrupt' phrase in the 1959 Act, during his opening statement. Gardiner said:

In a case like this one [it] is perhaps permitted to reflect that nobody suggests that the Director of Public Prosecutions becomes depraved or corrupted. Counsel read the book; they do not become depraved or corrupted. Witnesses read the book; they do not become depraved or corrupted. Nobody suggests the Judge or the Jury become corrupted. It is always somebody else; it is never ourselves.<sup>44</sup>

Thus it appears that depravity and corruption are more likely to occur among the lower classes which view Griffith-Jones emphasised when he asked the jury: 'Is it a book you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?' However, that statement, along with the one 'girls can read as well as boys', was perhaps more offensive to the nascent feminist brigade than to the so-called 'lower classes'. It would be a brave witness who would be prepared to stand up in court and admit to being depraved or corrupted by something they had read.<sup>45</sup>

Griffith-Jones' opening statement goes on to briefly outline the book. He describes Lady Chatterley as a sex-starved girl. He lists the episodes of sexual intercourse and infers that the rest of the book is padding. He refers to the bawdy conversation and lists all the four-letter words and the number of times they are used. After reading from the inside cover of the book where the story of the love between a gamekeeper and the wife of a crippled intellectual is described as one of 'phallic tenderness' he explained to the jury what 'phallus' meant 'for those who have forgotten their Greek'<sup>46</sup> (a remark that might have antagonised

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<sup>44</sup> Rolph, p37.

<sup>45</sup> Rolph (p7) says that three of the jurors thought the book obscene but they were persuaded by the other nine to change their minds, 'it is rather difficult to see, in the case of a man who knows himself to have no literary judgement, what else he can do.'

Leavis said in 1932 (op.cit. p244), and there is no reason to doubt that the situation was any different in 1960, that 'the bulk of the reading public, has no means of knowing what it really thinks and feels' because their minds have 'been fed on films, magazines, newspapers, and best-sellers'. So the jurors having listened to the academics and authors telling them that a particular book is not obscene, they were not likely to decide otherwise.

<sup>46</sup> Montgomery Hyde, p18.

some jury members.) However, Griffith-Jones was supposedly trying to secure a ban on the novel so his interpretation was valid, although he made no reference at that time to the one episode that would have secured a conviction.

Another anomaly of this case was that only one witness for the prosecution was called and that was Detective Inspector Charles Monahan, the policeman who had gone to Penguin's offices to collect the twelve copies of the novel, and after the opening speeches of the prosecution and that of the defence, who claimed that there was no case to answer, the trial was adjourned to give the jury time to read the novel. There must have been illustrious literary figures with adverse opinions on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* but none were called. F R Leavis had refused to appear as a witness in support and Morpurgo reports that the reason that he gave to Rubinstein was: 'I can see no reason for Sir Allen's knight errantry, unless he has a Golden Fleece in view.'<sup>47</sup> With thirty-five witnesses called by the defence, many of them well-known names to the general public, all claiming that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was of literary merit and not likely to 'deprave or corrupt', there was little chance that the jury would disagree.

All the papers relating to the defence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* have been given to Bristol University by Michael Rubinstein and there are many files relating to witnesses, possible witnesses, and potential witnesses for the prosecution. According to Steve Hare,<sup>48</sup> Bill (Sir William Emrys) Williams of Penguin Books started the letter writing campaign to find these witnesses before Rubinstein took it over. A very wide and varied field was trawled for these possible defence witnesses and there is no evidence of Rubinstein being advised about whom to approach, and of those he did many refused because they did not believe that they were competent enough to support the case. As examples of the variety of those approached

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<sup>47</sup> Morpurgo, p324.

<sup>48</sup> Hare, p242.

and who refused, there was the classical scholar Maurice Bowra, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford; Lord Birkett, who disqualified himself saying that he was not an expert and that he was sitting in the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords the following term as a judge therefore he could not give advice or be a witness; Rev. D S Bailey of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council; Lord Boothby, who would not give evidence 'because I think it is one of D.H.Lawrence's least good works', and Vera Brittain - a written reply to the request is not among the letters but it would appear she objected on the grounds of Lawrence's treatment of women. Enid Blyton, whose husband said she could not give evidence, in her reply said:

I cannot IMAGINE why Penguin Books Ltd have put my name on their *Lady Chatterley's Lover* list. (Can you? After all, I'm only a children's writer - whose opinions surely would not weigh with the adult public! Don't you think there is something slightly comic about E.B. solemnly declaring that *L.C.Lover* is a fit and proper book for everyone's reading?)

I'd love to help Penguins Ltd - they are doing a fine job with their publications - but I don't see how I can. for one thing I haven't read the book - and for another thing my husband said NO at once. The thought of me standing up in Court solemnly advocating a book 'like that' (his words, not mine - I feel he must have read the book!) made his hair stand on end. I'm awfully sorry - but I don't see that I can go against him. I feel impelled to read the book now of course (what MARVELLOUS publicity it is having and how pleased Penguins must be!) though a woman author (for adults) once told me that it was dull and badly written. Can you convey my apologies to Penguins, and let them know that while I *am* against too much censorship of books, I really cannot go against my husband's most definite wishes in this. ('To think of *my* wife standing up and advocating the reading of pornographic books - a well-loved author for *children* - you'd be condemned by every parent!') I think possibly it *would* be stupid for a children's author to join in, and I have a feeling that you would probably agree with me in that? I still feel most astonished that anyone should have thought my opinions would carry any weight with the *novel*- reading public. Do your best for me, won't you - and *don't* let Penguins think I'm too uncooperative for words, anyway, they'll have a long string of scintillating names of critics and writers - and don't *really* need such small fry as children's writers at all!

Another reply from E J Dingwall of the Department of Printed Books, the British Museum, had Dickensian<sup>49</sup> overtones with his emphasis on facts:

It is the policy of the Museum, as confirmed to me by the Principal Keeper, to recommend that members of the staff should give evidence in cases of this kind only in matters of *fact*. What you are suggesting is that I give an opinion on the very vague question as to whether I consider the publication of LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER is " for the public good". I regret that in the circumstances I am not able to help you in this matter.

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<sup>49</sup> The character, Thomas Gradgrind, in Dickens' *Hard Times* was a great believer in facts.

The suggestion that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was being published 'for the public good' sounds somewhat disingenuous since it was for Penguin's 'good' that it was being published, although, to be fair, Mr Dingwall may have been repeating words from the letter that was sent to him which may have quoted parts of the new Act. Asking a representative of the British Museum to give evidence for the defence appears to be far-fetched but perhaps the reason why they were approached is because the British Museum had released the manuscript of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* in January 1960<sup>50</sup> thereby possibly giving the defence the idea that an 'amnesty for wicked authors was in the air.'<sup>51</sup>

And finally, there was a letter from Dame Edith Evans, who wrote:

As I have not yet read the book, I cannot give you an opinion, and I am very much averse to any form of publicity which is not directly connected with my own profession. But if I cannot buy the book, how am I to read it?

I would be more willing, after reading it, to give you my opinion in writing, and if that is any value, I will do so.

In his reply to her Rubinstein said that she would have to give evidence in Court and 'it is clear from your letter that you would not want to do this. ...In the circumstances I cannot, of course, arrange for you to be sent a copy of the book, but I very much hope that you will be able to read one, obtained publicly, in a few months' time.' From the files it would appear that Dame Edith was the only prospective defence witness who had made comments about not having read the novel who was refused a free copy. Of the 300 proof copies supplied to Rubinstein fifty-eight remained unaccounted for by 26 August 1960.

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<sup>50</sup> *De Profundis* is a letter written by Oscar Wilde while he was in prison (1895-1897) to Lord Alfred Douglas in which he provided an apologia for his own conduct. It was partially published in 1905.

<sup>51</sup> Sutherland, *Offensive Literature*, p18.

Despite any rivalry that there might have been between publishing houses at the time of the trial, it must have been heartening for Penguin when they got support from their fellow publishers. Ruth Dudley Edwards, in her 1987 biography of Victor Gollancz, prints most of the letter he sent to Rubinstein on 22 August 1960, and it appears to sum up the feelings of many of the interested parties at that time:

I read 'L.C.' over the weekend, with, for the most part, unutterable boredom. Subject to what I am going to say in the next paragraph, it is a pretty bad novel, and a pretty badly written one too, full of Lawrence's abominable trick of repeating words and phrases for emphasis.

But there is an exception to all this: all the love scenes - all the parts, that is to say, for which the book is being persecuted - are superb, and, in the main, superbly written. To call them either pornographic or obscene would be fantastic. In their modern terms, they don't fall very far short of the Song of Songs: I would go as far as to say that they glorify the creator of human bodies ...

I could not imagine a more deplorable piece of topsy-turvydom than that 'Lady Chatterley' should be condemned, and the really vile 'Lolita' get through. Such a contrast must stink in the nostrils of honest people who have any taste whatever.<sup>52</sup>

Looking back to 1960 from the late 1990s it remains a 'deplorable piece of topsy-turvydom' that a book which condones paedophilia should have preference over one that deals with adult sex. Sutherland suggests that it was because '*Lolita* was chaste stylistically' whereas '*Lady Chatterley's Lover* 'had a profusion of four-letter words ...and a jury would more easily apprehend the obscenity of, say, Mellor's encomiastic "Tha's got the nicest arse of anybody...An' if tha shits an' if tha pisses, I'm glad"',<sup>53</sup> which further reinforces the idea that the prosecution was class based.

Rubinstein's files have many lists of potential witnesses with lots of crossings out and scribbled notes on them; 'No.1' lists, and 'No.2' lists headed 'doubtful', and the Bristol University archivist has put together another file labelled: 'Potential witnesses who were asked to give evidence, but no final answer whether they are willing to give evidence or not is in the file'; A J Ayer and John Betjeman were just two of the names noted. All the

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<sup>52</sup> Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1987. p677.

<sup>53</sup> Sutherland, *Offensive Literature*, p18.

potential witnesses made statements about their willingness to appear for the defence and why, and as well as all those that did appear, and those held in reserve, there were thirty-six more if the defence needed them. Of the thirty-nine who were scheduled to appear in Court, sixteen of them elected to receive no expenses.<sup>54</sup>

Even though the Lady Chatterley case was considered to be a test case for the new 1959 Obscene Publications Act, the huge array of potential defence witnesses seems to be excessive and unnecessary in comparison to the likelihood of there being any prosecution witnesses. Although Griffith-Jones did not call any witnesses, apart from the policeman, Rubinstein's office had made pertinent notes about five possible ones. After summarising the many academic achievements and still more publications of Dr Carlos Paton Blacker someone has written:

A practising psychologist ... is still regarded as completely mis-placed in Psychology - "no good at it". He might be asked in cross examination about the effect of the sterilisation he recommends upon the unfortunate wife of anyone sterilised, a situation which might correspond with that of Sir Clifford and L.C. in the book.<sup>55</sup>

(Apparently this potential witness was a believer in eugenics, ie no mating of criminals or undesirables, the helpful notes had added.)<sup>56</sup> In the case of another academic, John Sparrow, Warden of All Souls, Oxford, the notes appear to have been compiled by J I M Stewart<sup>57</sup> of Christ Church, Oxford, because someone has added: 'off the record, Mr Stewart, thinks that dominantly there is a dash of Sir Clifford Chatterley in Mr Sparrow who, he is sure, sympathises with Sir Clifford and "hates our Connie"!'. The rest of the barbed notes say of Sparrow:

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<sup>54</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>55</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>56</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>57</sup> He also wrote detective stories under the pseudonym Michael Innes.

He is expert on poetry and Latin verse, and translations from the Latin. Not known to be an expert on D.H. Lawrence and as All Souls is not an undergraduate college it is not believed that his contact with undergraduates and other people is in any sense, properly described as educational, or concerning, or considering, or solving the problems natural to them.<sup>58</sup>

The other three listed potential prosecution witnesses were Esther Forbes, Richard Church and Sir Basil Blackwell. Of the American Esther Forbes, it is noted that she is the author of a very badly written report published in an edition of *The First Lady Chatterley*, and extremely critical of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and '... it would be apparent that she is capable of writing very bad English herself and cannot be taken seriously as a judge of Lawrence as a writer of English'.<sup>59</sup> The note compiler says of Richard Church that he has been through an unhappy period having left his first wife and children, but is now '... writing a book on Shelley which seems to have influenced his mind though he is probably fundamentally a puritan. Is very much dominated by his present wife - a good chap but rather woolly-minded'.<sup>60</sup> Finally, it is said of Sir Basil Blackwell:

Is believed to have directed his bookshops not to display *LOLITA* and no doubt other books which he regarded as unsuitable for free purchase by the undergraduates and citizens of Oxford but to have permitted such books to be sold either from stock or on order. To this extent he may be presumed to regard it as one of a bookseller's duties to his public to act as unofficial censor.<sup>61</sup>

Of course what Blackwell's bookshop sold was a matter for the owner and if he chose not to feature certain books then that was his choice but it is worth noting that this censorship was only superficial: commercial instincts overcame his moral ones since it appears the censored books were available under the counter.

A further note relating to Sir Basil says:

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<sup>58</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>59</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>60</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>61</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

Nevertheless at Instructing Solicitor's instigation there were purchased from two of Sir Basil's bookshops in Oxford certain books containing words and passages no better than some words and passages in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to which it may be presumed Sir Basil takes objection.<sup>62</sup>

The books purchased, and the receipts carefully kept, were *Aphrodite* by Pierre Louys, hardback 15/- (75p) but available in paperback edition at 2/6 (12½ p), *Scottsboro' Boy* by Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad, 3/6 (17½ p), Ace book, and two Penguins, *The Woman of Rome* by Alberto Moravia and *By Love Possessed* by James Gould Cozzens. Being paperbacks and therefore cheap, like the contested edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was an important point to be pressed if necessary by the defence because one of the issues concerning the prosecution was that the novel would be available, like all the other Penguin publications, at 3/6 (17½ p).<sup>63</sup> This was not, however, the only book shopping, the defence was prepared to do. Rubinstein had asked for a list of paperbacks currently available on bookstalls with lurid covers and blurbs. Eighteen were found and would have been used by the defence, for example: Evan Hunter's *Strangers When We Meet*, ('A novel of adultery'), and Zola's *Nana* ('Never before has a woman's rise through the exploitation of her sex been so powerfully depicted').<sup>64</sup> However, the luridness of the covers was hardly appropriate in relation to the book on trial because in the 1960s Penguins had very sedate, uniform covers for their paperbacks.

Rubinstein was also very well prepared with a schedule of good and bad passages in the novel should any reference be needed in court. Under those listed as 'Important and beautiful or powerful passages'<sup>65</sup> he has:

p56/7 The end of the affair with Michaelis '... this speech was one of the critical blows of Connie's life';  
p104 bottom paragraph to p105 top paragraph, Mrs Bolton, the novel, and gossip;  
p178-185, 217-221 Two of the larger expurgated passages which extol the beauty and tenderness and mutual care of the man and woman for each other: compare p56/57 - the evening with Michaelis;  
p277 Lines 2-7 'It's the one insane taboo left: sex as a natural thing'(sic);

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<sup>62</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>63</sup> Rubinstein file, DM1819.

<sup>64</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>65</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.



p291/2 (bottom 7 lines and turnover to 1st 4 paragraphs) Concerning tenderness - the point of the book. (eg. p292 '... the creative act that is far more than procreative').

And under those listed as 'Weak or difficult passages'<sup>66</sup> he has:

p211/2 (turnover paragraph to 'seems to me they're nearly all Lesbian.');

p258 'It was a night of sensual passion ... the same on Greek vases everywhere.'

p259 'And what a reckless devil ... and how he pressed in on her' etc.

p280 (2nd half of first full paragraph) '... in the Italian way' etc.

p296/7 The conversation between Mellors and L C's father. Mr J I M Stewart has commented to Instructing Solicitors on this passage, as follows:

Fathers look to your daughters: It has struck me as perhaps just worth pointing out here (although you have probably considered it) that the place most likely to disconcert a witness (certainly it would be so with me) is not any of the passages between Mellors and Connie, but the passage (Chap. xviii p296/7) between Mellors and Connie's father. This is the nearest the book gets to being revolting, and the reason of course, is that the passage is false. There seems to be 2 reasons for this howler (which is what it is) and one of them is interesting from our point of view. The first of course is just obstinate residual social ignorance. But we come to the other when DHL here speaks of "the old free-masonry of male sensuality between them". But all his life he was much too pure of (sic) hear (or puritanical) to listen in on it in pub or smoking-room for thirty seconds longer than he need. So when he takes a wild shot at it he gets it screamingly wrong.'

(The page numbers used in the above quotes presumably come from the 1st published edition of the novel. However, the page numbers are the same as those in the 1961 2nd Penguin edition.)

It would have been worth debating with Stewart why he thinks that 'he [Lawrence] gets it screamingly wrong' in the last passage listed. Lawrence said: 'I want men and women to be able to think sex, fully, completely, honestly, and cleanly'<sup>67</sup> and in this passage he is showing what he believed he was up against amongst the so-called upper classes. There is nothing 'clean' or 'honest' about the way Connie's father is behaving.

Rubinstein also had prepared a list of books and articles containing hostile criticism of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. These were Hugh Kingsmill's biography of D H Lawrence; William Tindall's *D H Lawrence and Susan His Cow*; Richard Aldington's *Portrait of a Genius* - BUT ...; Eric Bentley's *Cult of the Superman*; and T S Eliot's *After Strange Gods*, and a review in the *Criterion*, July 1931, of John Middleton Murry's *Son of Woman*.<sup>68</sup> It is strange to see T S

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<sup>66</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence, 'A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"', p308.

<sup>68</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

Eliot being listed alongside potentially damning criticism of Lawrence's novel because he was one of those who had supplied a statement to Rubinstein offering to be a possible defence witness. He was held in reserve outside the Court in case, as the thirty-sixth expert, he was needed 'to recant in public his thirty-year-old denigration of Lawrence'.<sup>69</sup> Morpurgo suggests that perhaps the prosecution was not aware that Eliot had written about Lawrence in 1933, but if Eliot was called to give evidence he was going to repeat what he had said to Rubinstein: 'I am not necessarily to be assumed to agree with all my earlier opinions, some of which I now regard as being immature, ill-considered and ... too violent.'<sup>70</sup>

Ordinary members of the public were also keen for their opinions to be known before, during and after the trial and sent letters to Rubinstein's office offering advice and suggestions about examples he could use of books that they considered obscene and depraved. There were also those who wrote to Penguin's offices who were very opposed to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the profits being made from the book. One enclosed a newspaper cutting reporting the huge profits made attached to another cutting which was an advertisement for what was then the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief with the suggestion that all the profits should go to that charity. One particularly incensed letter writer, who gave his name and address, as most of them did, referred to Allen Lane as a 'stinker', and the expert evidence at the trial as 'pure bullshit', but that particular letter did not have 'don't reply' pencilled on it as did a typed diatribe signed Potocki of Montalk.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Morpurgo, p324.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819. In 1932 Count Potocki de Montalk had written some erotic poems which he wanted printed privately but the printer was so shocked by them that he handed them to the police. He subsequently served six months in jail for them. (Montgomery Hyde, p5).

Morpurgo says that the *Lady Chatterley* case merits a place in legal history for one particular reason because 'it stands as a proud justification of the jury system'.<sup>72</sup> These are contentious words. In this case the jury system was without a doubt a great asset to the defence because it was highly unlikely that any of the twelve ordinary citizens in the jury would dare dispute the evidence<sup>73</sup> of such notable witnesses as Sir Stanley Unwin, for example, who was introduced as 'a long-established member of the Executive of the British Council and of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the recipient of numerous honours, and a man with ten grandchildren', as well as being 'managing director of Allen & Unwin, and a publisher for fifty-six years'.<sup>74</sup> Or Mr Raymond Williams who was introduced as 'Staff Tutor in English at the Oxford University Extra-Mural Delegacy, W.E.A. lecturer, student of Lawrence, and author of a number of books on the moral attitudes of leading English writers'.<sup>75</sup> Even when the jury appeared to recognise a witness, after he was unfamiliarly introduced as Edward Morgan Forster, they were not likely to argue about his testimony after a long list of his honorary degrees and his books were read out.<sup>76</sup> The defence did, however, imply a connection with the jury when Mr Richard Hoggart was introduced to them 'as a man who went from elementary school and grammar school to university and took an English degree',<sup>77</sup> but then went on to point out his more well-known attributes which brought him to the defence of *Lady Chatterley*.

However, several of the witnesses agreed that *Lady Chatterley* was not Lawrence's best work, for example: Graham Hough, Norman St John-Stevas, Noel Annan, and Dame Rebecca West who made her remarks more personal:

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<sup>72</sup> Morpurgo. p318.

<sup>73</sup> Here I am referring to the *Lady Chatterley* case, but other juries have found for the prosecution in obscenity trials. For example: Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (April 1964) and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (November 1963).

<sup>74</sup> Rolph, p149.

<sup>75</sup> Rolph, p133.

<sup>76</sup> Rolph, p112.

<sup>77</sup> Rolph, p91.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is full of sentences of which any child could make a fool, because they are badly written. He was a man with no background of formal education in his home. He also had a great defect which mars this book. He had absolutely no sense of humour. A lot of pages in this book are, to my point of view, ludicrous, but I would still say this is a book of undoubted literary merit.<sup>78</sup>

W E Williams, in his book *Allen Lane: A Personal Portrait*, draws attention to the fact, as so many other commentators did, that 'it seemed incredible that the Crown should be unable to rustle up a solitary witness to support its contention that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was an obscene book. The only man to say so in this six-day trial was the Treasury Counsel, Griffith-Jones.'<sup>79</sup> In the first few lines of his closing speech for the prosecution Griffith-Jones appeared sensitive to the situation that he was in: 'It is easy enough, particularly in a case of this kind, to poke fun at the Prosecution, to draw laughs as to the conduct and the observations which have passed',<sup>80</sup> and then he goes on to say quite clearly why he did not produce witnesses (while keeping quiet about the fact that he had not got any):

As to the merit of this book as literature ... I conceded this in practically the first words I uttered in this case - that Lawrence is a great writer. I never challenged his honesty of purpose. I never challenged that this book was a book of some merit; ... They were matters, therefore, upon which it would have been wholly irrelevant and redundant to call evidence for the Prosecution. ... Upon the question of whether this book is obscene, members of the jury, I am barred from calling any evidence because the Act restricts me to calling evidence only as to the literary and other merits of the book.<sup>81</sup>

Griffith-Jones followed this by telling the jury: 'You are going to decide this case, are you not, on the document itself, in accordance with what my Lord will lay down to you as being the principles of law which you are to apply',<sup>82</sup> and it was at that point he had, in essence, completed his case. However, he did go on for some time about the meanings of obscenity, depravity and corruption, whether the book was a supporter of marriage or whether it

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<sup>78</sup> Rolph, p68.

<sup>79</sup> W E Williams, *Allen Lane; A Personal Portrait*, London: The Bodley Head, 1973. p82/83.

<sup>80</sup> Rolph, p206.

<sup>81</sup> Rolph, p207/208.

<sup>82</sup> Rolph, p208.

condemned promiscuity, and, at some length, about the relevance of some of the questions asked of the witnesses by the defence team and about the defence witnesses themselves. Then he read a passage from the novel which, if he had elaborated on it to the jury, would have cancelled out all the evidence of the thirty-five witnesses for the defence. Instead he said to the jury: 'Not very easy, sometimes, not very easy to know what he is driving at in that passage.'<sup>83</sup> It is the passage in which Lawrence describes 'the night of sensual passion':

It was a night of sensual passion, in which she was a little startled and almost unwilling: yet it pierced again with piercing thrills of sensuality, different, sharper, more terrible than the thrills of tenderness, but, at the moment, more desirable. Though a little frightened, she let him have his way, and the reckless, shameless sensuality shook her to her foundations, stripped her to the very last, and made a different woman of her. It was not really love. It was not voluptuousness. It was sensuality sharp and searing as fire, burning the soul to tinder.

Burning out the shames, the deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places. It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her.<sup>84</sup>

Since Griffith-Jones brought this particular passage to the attention of the jury he was being perhaps a trifle disingenuous by suggesting that he did not know what Lawrence was 'driving at'. There is no explanation as to why he did not stress this passage to the jury during the course of the trial, why he did not bring it up with any of the witnesses, especially those from the Church, particularly since the defence counsel had stressed that there was no 'perversion' in the book when there patently is. If two people were caught committing such a 'perversion' in those days it was a crime punishable by life imprisonment.

Rubinstein, however, was prepared for the fact that the prosecution might bring up the subject of buggery. In a draft brief<sup>85</sup> dated 7 October 1960, section 4 (b), there is noted:

... if any emphasis laid upon implication or indication of buggery in the book it should be pointed out that (i) this is certainly not a dominant impression left by the book "taken as a whole" (ii) that Cellini himself (p282 of the Pelican *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*) disputes the meaning attributed to him on p280 of the book of "the Italian way" if this is alleged to mean buggery and (iii) compare poem on p36 of Petronius *The Satyricon* (2/6 paperback on Foyles' outside stall!).

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<sup>83</sup> Rolph, p221.

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p246/247.

<sup>85</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

But that particular passage was ignored by both sides. Why Griffith-Jones did not use the one 'weapon' he had, which would have won him the case, remains a mystery, but it might have saved him from the opprobrium that was heaped on him by the broadsheet columnists and others after the trial. Even the Judge, Mr Justice Byrne, appeared to collude with him in willing the prosecution to fail by what Rolph describes as a misdirection to the jury in his summing-up when he said: '... our criminal law in this country is based upon the view that a jury takes of the facts and not upon the view that experts may have.' Rolph's reason for seeing this as misdirection is: '... if Parliament makes 'scientific merits' relevant, and provides for the calling of scientific experts, can a Judge properly tell a jury to ignore such evidence and form their own scientific views? If not, are literary merits subject to a different test?'<sup>86</sup> But that proved to be just hypothetical; *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was found 'Not Guilty' and thus became available on the open British market.

However, it must be considered that Penguin Books was not totally exonerated. They were refused costs. When Gardiner made his application for costs he referred to the extensive costs (they were actually £13,000)<sup>87</sup> and 'as the case was opened by the Prosecution as a test case, I would respectfully submit that it is a case in which a very substantial contribution ought to be made ...'.<sup>88</sup> In Rolph's transcription of the trial he ends it with the words of the Judge in answer to Gardiner: 'I will say no more than this, that I will make no order as to costs.'<sup>89</sup> The Judge was, no doubt, as aware as everyone else that the costs involved were minute in comparison to the figures to be gained by the 'Not Guilty' verdict.

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<sup>86</sup> Rolph, p226.

<sup>87</sup> Morpurgo, p325.

<sup>88</sup> Rolph, p249.

<sup>89</sup> Rolph, p250.

Andrew Shonfield<sup>90</sup> and John Sparrow<sup>91</sup> writing in *Encounter* after the court case were very blunt in their views about the offending passage that Griffith-Jones had read out. Shonfield, in an article entitled *Lawrence's Other Censor*, accuses Lawrence of expurgating his own unexpurgated edition because 'he cannot bring himself to use words that will baldly describe these intimacies'. He picks out the passages where Lawrence is 'coily' referring to 'anal perversion' and calls Lawrence a coward for not being honest. Sparrow agrees with Shonfield, although he frankly refers to buggery in his long article about the 'humbug' of the trial, and gives details as to why he finds 'the novel extremely distasteful, despite its serious purpose and the brilliance of a number of passages in it, and think it a failure both as a moral or sociological tract and as a work of art',<sup>92</sup> thus dismissing the views and opinions of the thirty-five eminent trial witnesses.

A similar dismissal was enacted by the eighty-six year-old Lord Teviot in a debate he initiated in the House of Lords following the trial. He drafted a Motion in which he wanted to ask the Government 'whether they will take such steps as are possible to ban for all time writings of this kind, particularly those of the author of this book'.<sup>93</sup> Nine peers spoke in the debate but only two supported the Motion, and it was Lord Hailsham, who brought the debate to a close saying that after a jury trial a particular member of the House of Lords could not ask for a change in the law because he did not like the jury's verdict.

The jury's decision was not only a matter for the British: the Prime Minister of Australia did not like the verdict either. Geoffrey Robertson, QC, who wrote a new foreword for the thirtieth anniversary commemorative edition of the trial transcript, records that Prime

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<sup>90</sup> Andrew Shonfield, 'Lawrence's Other Censor', *Encounter*, September 1961. p63/64.

<sup>91</sup> John Sparrow, 'Regina v. Penguin Books Ltd: An Undisclosed Element in the Case', *Encounter*, February 1962. p35-43.

<sup>92</sup> Sparrow, p36.

<sup>93</sup> 'The "Lady Chatterley's Lover" Case', *Hansard*, Vol 227, No 23, columns 528-574, 14 December 1960.

Minister Menzies told his cabinet that he would not allow his wife to read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and, as well as banning the novel, he banned C H Rolph's account of the trial.

Robertson goes on to describe how a perspicacious bookseller got around the ban and produced his own edition: 'his friends in England wrote down every word of Mr Rolph's work on thirty-two tightly spaced airletters, which were despatched to Australia in a manner that eluded smut-sniffing customs officials.'<sup>94</sup> It is on the back cover of this 1990 book that a phrase frequently used in the 1960s equating the trial to a D H Lawrence seminar is used again with added detail of the social conventions of that time:

*The Trial of Lady Chatterley* serves both as an account of the most expansive (and expensive) seminar on the works of D H Lawrence ever given, and as a timely reminder of the repressive, humourless and class-ridden moral orthodoxies of an era when, as Geoffrey Robertson, QC, recalls in his new foreword, 'homosexuality and abortion were criminal offences and divorced men were not allowed to read the news on the BBC.

Australia was not the only Commonwealth country to ban this book. In 1965 the Supreme Court of India upheld the conviction of a Bombay bookseller who had sold a copy of the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. That judgement just increased the underground circulation of the book and ensured greater publicity far beyond that engendered through the efforts of the booksellers themselves.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, the publicity surrounding the British court case increased sales leading to the phenomenal sales figures mentioned in the first paragraph, thereby boosting the bestseller status of the book and making Sir Allen Lane a millionaire, who expressed his gratitude to the trial jury of nine men and three women by dedicating the next editions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to them.

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<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey Robertson, The Thirtieth Anniversary Commemorative Edition, *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited*, edited by C H Rolph, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990. pVII.

<sup>95</sup> Girja Kumar, *Censorship in India: With special reference to 'The Satanic Verses' and 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1990.



Among the Penguin Archive files at Bristol University, is a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings detailing the money made by Penguin Books in that crucial year. In 1960 the money earned by *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from the nearly two million copies sold contributed £62,000 to that year's record profit level of £364,588, nearly three times the level of 1959. Total book sales for 1960 were £17.1 million.<sup>96</sup> Reports of a predicted £500,000 profit for 1961 helped tremendously when Penguin Books Ltd was floated on the Stock Market on 20 April 1961,<sup>97</sup> apparently after four years of discussion.<sup>98</sup> It was 150 times oversubscribed,<sup>99</sup> with £67,000,000 sent in for the issue of 750,000 Ordinary 4/- (20p) shares,<sup>100</sup> colloquially referred to as 'Chatterley's'. However, profits fluctuated, falling in 1962, up again in 1963, but by then it was the book trade itself not *Lady Chatterley* causing the swing. Steve Hare ends his chapter on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with the sentence: 'Rubinstein, Nash & Co., the firm that had been Penguin's solicitors from their inception in 1935, was subsequently dropped in favour of another practice, who handled the flotation.'<sup>101</sup> When asked why, Rubinstein diplomatically said it was because it was not his area of expertise, although there were other partners in his firm who could have dealt with it.<sup>102</sup>

One of the interesting sequels to the trial of *Lady Chatterley* was that in 1973 Michael Rubinstein wrote to the 'experts' who had given evidence for the defence asking them if they would like to contribute to a projected book of essays.<sup>103</sup> He suggested that they

might approach the subject from the point of view of their memories of the experience of giving evidence at the trial and of its effect on their lives in subsequent months and years, or on their retrospective thoughts and emotions arising out of the impact of the verdict in relation to literary attitudes, public opinion and the emergence of a 'permissive society' (were we flowing with a stream or did we open the floodgates?).

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<sup>96</sup> Penguin Archive, DM 1613. Sales conference 28 April 1966.

<sup>97</sup> Penguin Archive, DM 1613.

<sup>98</sup> Morpurgo, p326.

<sup>99</sup> *The Times*, 29 April 1961. Penguin Archive, DM 1613.

<sup>100</sup> *Daily Mail*, 24 April 1961. Penguin Archive, DM 1613.

<sup>101</sup> Hare, p249.

<sup>102</sup> Personal telephone conversation with Michael Rubinstein, 13 March 1999.

<sup>103</sup> Rubinstein file, DM 1819.

He had compiled, or perhaps 'doodled' would be more appropriate, fifty-four suggested titles for this project. The first one was: *Lady Chatterley's Lover as a Peg*, and the fifty-fourth one was: *That's not what I meant at all*. However, according to Rubinstein's papers, he subsequently referred to it as: *Confounded Experts: Afterthoughts by Expert Witnesses to the Literary or Other Merits of Lady Chatterley's Lover* and he issued bulletins at different times about progress. In May 1974 the *Confounded Experts* Bulletin No 4 reported that Rubinstein had approached seven well-known publishers, including Penguin, with his idea but all seven had turned down his proposal because there was 'insufficient commercial justification for such a book'. One small company, Quartet Books, expressed an interest but the advance they offered would have worked out as only about £50 per contributor. Rubinstein thought that this was too embarrassingly low to even consider for the 5,000 word essays he had suggested.<sup>104</sup> It appears that the idea died as there were no more letters or references in Rubinstein's files.

Another much later publication that did come to fruition was a novel published by Macmillan in 1995, *Lady Chatterley's Confession*, advertised as 'an extraordinary sequel to a legendary and bestselling novel' by 'one of our most distinguished authors and a recognised expert on Lawrence'. Elaine Feinstein's book, retailing at the pretentious price of ten guineas, picks up the story of Connie and Mellors where Lawrence left off. Perhaps in another thirty-five years, someone else will see the potential in a spin-off from this book and write about Emily's angst in being the daughter of such unconventional parents.

And this was not the only Lady Chatterley spin-off in the 1990s. The comedian Spike Milligan published his parodied version of the story in 1994 and the tone of it is illustrated in

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<sup>104</sup> In the 1970s a solicitor's salary was less than that of university academic staff and his income was presumably less than that of the authors who gave evidence at the trial, therefore Rubinstein was in a position to judge whether or not the fee offered was acceptable.

part by the 1995 paperback cover blurb: 'Spike Milligan's rendition is both fanciful and illuminating (at least two candle-power), unfaithful and downright distasteful - fancy having it off with a forget-me-not up your nostril.'<sup>105</sup> Malcolm Gluck used the relationship between Connie Chatterley and Mellors as the basis of his 1999 Christmas wine recommendations in the Sainsbury's magazine<sup>106</sup> which must indicate how well *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has been incorporated into the common culture, helped, one suspects, by the two versions of the book filmed by Ken Russell. The first in 1993 had erotic scenes censored by the BBC, but the explicit sex scenes of the 1995 version, the BBC argued, had to be included to do justice to the book, despite many complaints received by the Broadcasting Standards Council from some of the 16,000,000 viewers.<sup>107</sup>

This liberal attitude to sexuality in books and film is thought to have been heralded by the publication of the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 and it is this attitude that led to other important changes going on in Britain apart from those in the publishing world. Kenneth Tynan was the first to shock sections of the viewing public by saying 'fuck' during a television studio discussion in November 1966. Prescriptions for the contraceptive pill were freely available in 1962, and the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality, within well-defined limits, happened in 1967. The censorship of plays for public performance by the Lord Chamberlain's office, a practice going back to 1737, came to an end in 1968, and in 1969 capital punishment was abolished. All these gave rise to a new permissiveness in a society that was attempting to throw off the shadows of the immediate post war years. 'Liberalisation was fought every inch' says John Sutherland, 'but its tide in the 1960s was irresistible.'<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Spike Milligan, *Lady Chatterley's Lover According to Spike Milligan*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995. First published by Michael Joseph, 1994.

<sup>106</sup> Malcolm Gluck, Sainsbury's *The Magazine*, December 1999. p183-185.

<sup>107</sup> *The Times*, 23 May 1995.

<sup>108</sup> Sutherland, *Offensive Literature*, p2.

## CHAPTER 5

### *The Thorn Birds*

In the Bestsellers section of Chapter 1 I observe that 'it is the romantic books written by women which are the most popular overall', and as an example of this my second choice of book is *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough, a book that has maintained its popularity since its original publication date in 1977. As a result, McCullough is another author who cannot be considered as poverty-stricken although she admits to writing this novel with the intention of making money. Popular romantic fiction has a long history so this novel is not a consequence of the 1960s liberalisation of the arts, therefore, at first glance, it is an unlikely novel to follow *Lady Chatterley's Lover* but in analysing them similarities are evident. At the heart of both novels is an ill-matched romance which has led to condemnation from certain critics but whole-hearted support from most of their readers.

John G Cawelti says that 'most modern romance formulas are essentially affirmations of the ideals of monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity',<sup>1</sup> a statement which surely cannot explain the romance's appeal for so many readers, and one that certainly does not apply to *The Thorn Birds*. But when he goes on to say that 'all formulaic stories are melodramatic',<sup>2</sup> which suggests therefore that romance is a specialised form of melodrama, the appeal of romance, and in particular *The Thorn Birds*, becomes more apparent because with melodrama the plot is complicated, with multiple sub-plots following the intersecting, and often colourful, lives of different characters. Yet, despite all the various predicaments of the characters, in the finale of a melodrama, there is no disruption of the moral order because, as Cawelti says, any sins the characters have committed are 'lovingly and sado-masochistically

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<sup>1</sup> John G Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976. p42.

<sup>2</sup> Cawelti, p45.

punished at great length'<sup>3</sup> and the suffering and violence involved 'are means of testing and ultimately demonstrating the "rightness" of the world order.'<sup>4</sup> However, even if *The Thorn Birds* is defined as a melodrama Cawelti says that 'there is no such thing as a formula for best-selling novels'<sup>5</sup> so there will be occasions when the formula cannot be applied to *The Thorn Birds* because each new novel brings amendments to the existing formulae.

Whether or not Colleen McCullough is demonstrating the 'rightness of the world order' in *The Thorn Birds* depends very much on the individual reader's assumptions and beliefs which are likely to vary or be modified over time. The changes in cultural, social and economic patterns since the 1960s have altered and expanded the nature of reality for women. The previously unquestioned assumption that marriage and children was sufficient fulfilment for a woman has been replaced by questions of identity, career, sexual and economic freedom as well as, but not necessarily, marriage and motherhood. In her romantic saga of the Cleary family McCullough offers portrayals of the diverse cultural changes and choices in the lives of women through her female characters covering the period 1915 to 1969. This gives her readers the opportunity to empathise with different female characters in the changing cultural environment as they comply or conflict with the masculine world. In the end, however, McCullough conforms to the romantic melodrama formula as Cawelti describes it, thereby ensuring her continuing readership which is proven by the sales figures.

But why do women, and possibly men, continue to read romantic stories when in real life they have plenty of opportunities to emulate the fictional characters? Lilian S Robinson, who compares Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer in her book *Sex, Class and Culture*,<sup>6</sup> suggests

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<sup>3</sup> Cawelti, Note 11, p316.

<sup>4</sup> Cawelti, p46.

<sup>5</sup> Cawelti, p260.

<sup>6</sup> Lilian S Robinson, 'On reading Trash', *Sex, Class and Culture*, London: Indiana University Press, 1978.

that romances are popular because their stories revolve around the private world of women; the domestic, marital and personal concerns which are important to women. The intention of these stories, she says, is not to 'teach' the female readers that their place is in the home but rather to reinforce the dominant ideology that they are experiencing in her own life.

Robinson concludes that 'it would appear that female readers do not seek out trashy novels in order to escape or to experience life vicariously, but rather to receive confirmation, and, eventually, affirmation, that love really is what motivates and justifies a woman's life.'<sup>7</sup> By conforming to the idea of a 'happy ending', McCullough appears to support that fictional view, although this may be because experience has taught her that readers prefer happy endings and McCullough wanted her book to be successful.

The marriage ending was sufficient in Jane Austen's time because that was the only 'career' a woman could have according to the dominant ideology then prevalent, and it continues to be prevalent in many of the current mass-market romances. In the contemporary family saga, however, the marriage is often at the beginning and from this marriage a long-term process begins with generations of the subsequent family going off in all directions allowing greater flexibility with the story line as characters experience broken marriages, unwanted or damaged children, fragmentation of their dreams, deaths and new beginnings, in true melodramatic style. Social and sexual taboos can also be transgressed, and not necessarily punished (despite Cawelti's definition), such as incestuous marriages (in Susan Howatch's *Penmarric*, and Sally Beauman's *Destiny*) and quasi-incestuous relationships, such as those in *The Thorn Birds*.<sup>8</sup> General historical detail can be introduced to add authenticity to some of the fictional happenings, such as wars for example, but it is the more detailed local history that often appeals to the readers. For example, Barbara Taylor Bradford's *A Woman of Substance* describes what it was like to be a young working-class girl in late nineteenth-

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, p222.

<sup>8</sup> Helen Taylor, 'Romantic Readers', *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World*, ed. Helen Carr, London: Pandora, 1989. p68.

century Yorkshire, and how anti-Semitism was rife in Leeds in the early twentieth-century; Howatch's *Penmarric* describes the industrial crisis around the mining industry in Cornwall, and, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* deals with the American Civil War<sup>9</sup> and the relationship between the black slaves and white landowners, which in 1936 when it was published was considered an acceptable relationship by many, although 60 years later, as assumptions and beliefs have changed the overt racism depicted is enough for some readers to discard the book. With *The Thorn Birds* it was descriptions of Australia and, in particular, life on a sheep station that interested the readers because knowledge of foreign countries often comes from the novels that they read.

It is this local historical knowledge allied to biographical detail in these family saga novels that suggests to Christine Bridgwood that the marketing of family sagas is following a different pattern to that, for example, of Mills and Boon romances where the author is almost anonymous.<sup>10</sup> She gives instances where biographical details of the author are used in advertising blurb to imply that the author is just like the reader except that the author's circumstances made her turn to writing as a way of living rather than continuing to be a business woman (Danielle Steele), or an articled clerk (Susan Howatch), or the head technician in a neurophysiology laboratory (Colleen McCullough),<sup>11</sup> and that by using personal experiences in the text the implication is that any woman can be a writer too. So, with family sagas, the publicity is directed not at the readers looking for escape from their every-day lives, but at readers who can associate themselves with the authors and their experiences as depicted in the text.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Taylor, p67.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Bridgwood, 'Family romances: the contemporary popular family saga', *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. Jean Radford, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. p169.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bridgwood, p171.

In 1984 Janice Radway published the results of a study of the reading habits of a group of 42 female romance readers in a small mid-Western American town called Smithton, which showed that readers of escapist romances also liked to associate themselves with the experiences of some of the characters in the novels. Although the sample is small and limited to the book buyers of one shop it does give remarkable insight into the vicissitudes of these women and how their lives are made bearable by the books they read. To qualify as a romance Radway says: 'the story must chronicle not merely the events of a courtship but what it feels like to be the object of one'.<sup>13</sup> By reading such a romance a woman can 'escape' her mundane life caring for an unappreciative husband and family and indulge herself in a private world, imagining herself as the heroine who is loved and cosseted by a handsome caring man, which in reality is not happening. Radway's research found (and it echoes Cawelti's definition) that the 'good' romance affirms that the traditional monogamous marriage remains the ultimate livelihood women should aspire to, and in doing so helps the women to accept their position in a society which advocates patriarchy.<sup>14</sup> A 'bad' romance featuring 'bed-hopping or promiscuous sex, a sad ending, rape, physical torture, and weak heroes'<sup>15</sup> runs counter to their belief in the therapeutic value of 'good' romance reading, because too often those sort of happenings are realities in the world around them.

The Smithton group was small, American and 1984 vintage but in 1991 Bridget Fowler published *The Alienated Reader*<sup>16</sup> in which she discusses the results of talking to 115 Scottish women about romance reading and her findings are similar to Radway's. One of the Scottish women said: 'Romance fiction is often the only use women have for their

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<sup>13</sup> Janice A Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, London: Verso, 1987. First published by The University of North Carolina Press, 1984. p64.

<sup>14</sup> Piers Paul Read put it more succinctly when he said: 'men's egos are very fragile, and God gave woman to man to bolster his ego, and her preoccupation should not be elsewhere, on her career or office politics.' *The Times*, 28 May 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Radway, p73.

<sup>16</sup> Bridget Fowler, *The Alienated Reader: Women and Popular Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.



imaginations...their sexual lives may be a disappointment, they're hankering after an attractive man; it's important to them but they are not allowed to talk about it.<sup>17</sup> Many of them talk about wanting to escape from their difficult lives into the imaginary fantasy world of the romance; they are looking for alternatives to reality where the ideal hero is sexually attractive, wealthy, and usually associated with the distinctive characteristics of the of the dominant class. Although realistic about their own place in society Fowler found that many of the lower-class romance readers accepted only upper-class heroes as being fit for idealisation;<sup>18</sup> they wanted their heroes 'unadulterated by alien traces of mundane reality'<sup>19</sup> because that is all part of the escapist nature of the text. By locating the hero outside the reality of many of the readers the writer conspires with the reader and endows the hero with the unlikely androgynous mixture of outstanding masculine phallic power and the feminine capacity for tenderness and care. This is exactly what McCullough has done with her character Father Ralph and that is the predominant reason for his and *The Thorn Birds* huge popularity with female readers ever since the book was published.

On November 8 1991 *Publishers Weekly* published a list of twenty of the all-time first fiction bestsellers from 1945 to that date based on hardback sales only.<sup>20</sup> Number five on that list was Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds* published in America by Harper and Row in 1977, which, by 1991, had sold 675,513 hardback copies. The paperback version was first published in 1978 and has sold more than 10,000,000 copies worldwide<sup>21</sup> following a series of twenty-seven reprintings, the last one being in 1995.

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<sup>17</sup> Fowler, p149.

<sup>18</sup> Fowler, p145.

<sup>19</sup> Fowler, p148.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix I. I would dispute McCullough's right to be on that list since *The Thorn Birds* was her second novel.

<sup>21</sup> A spokesperson for Warner Books, a division of Little, Brown and Company (UK), refused to disclose the exact figure but agreed that I would not be wrong if I used the figure 'ten million' quoted by John Sutherland in *Best Sellers: Popular Fiction for the 1970s*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. p75.

*The Thorn Birds* was indisputably "the number one international bestseller" of 1977-9; according to its publishers it was also "the publishing legend of the decade".<sup>22</sup> Prior to publication this particular novel was famous because of the \$100,000 that was spent by Harper & Row on their publicity campaign in April 1977. Two thousand advance-reading copies were circulated through the American book trade and there were 225,000 hardback copies in print three weeks before the official launch date. The excitement it generated made it number nine on the bestsellers list a week before anyone could legitimately buy the book in America. By the beginning of June 1977 it was number one on the list and as a hardback remained on the American list for a year.

Another reason for its fame was the record \$1.9 million paid for the paperback rights by Avon; the \$266,000 paid by Futura for the British hardback and paperback rights, plus the £50,000 they spent on the promotion; the \$220,000 paid for the German rights and the \$650,000 paid for the Australasian and overseas (ie outside America) rights. The film rights were sold in the September of that year to Warner Brothers for an undisclosed sum, but reported to have added a considerable amount to the \$2,722,900 already earned in advances.<sup>23</sup>

Colleen McCullough, with only one earlier book published (*Tim*, 1974), was little known before the phenomenal success of *The Thorn Birds* made her a household name, greatly helped by the three consecutive promotional tours in the US, the UK and Australia she undertook following publication.<sup>24</sup> Possibly one of the reasons why Harper & Row, Avon and Futura were prepared to risk so much capital in creating this particular bestseller was

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<sup>22</sup> Sutherland, p74/5.

<sup>23</sup> Sutherland, p75, and George Greenfield, *Scribblers for Bread: Aspects of the English Novel Since 1945*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989. p228.

<sup>24</sup> Sutherland, p76.

that by the 1970s the book trade had realised, through various surveys, that women readers accounted for almost two-thirds of the market for fiction and this novel was expected to appeal particularly to women. However, there was another specific reason for these publishers fighting off all competition for this book and that was the abolition of the Traditional Market Agreement in 1976.<sup>25</sup> As a result, this gave them access to the Australian market 'with the world's highest *per capita* book consumption'.<sup>26</sup>

Dorothy Green, in her caustic review of *The Thorn Birds*, asks the question: 'Why is this particular book singled out for promotion at this particular time?' and the answer she suggests is:

The comparative novelty of the setting and the flavour of genteel, ecclesiastical pornography would not be enough to make it a candidate for stardom, even though Americans, like the rest of the world, know very little about Australia and like a dash of religion with their sex. For various reasons, some of which might not bear close scrutiny, Miss McCullough's novel fulfils another need. Someone, somewhere has decided that the time has come to provide more information of a clearly defined kind about an important base in the South Pacific. The book provides a comprehensive image of Australia for ordinary Americans who can't go there, in a form which is easily grasped, and will not stir any awkward qualms in American hearts about their country's attitude to Australians. The image is essentially a "colonial" one, provincial...<sup>27</sup>

She goes on to say that 'Australia is seen as a nation of healthy peasants' and that 'the real, sophisticated world is elsewhere, thousands of miles away'. It is possible that in her slating of the book and her reference to the 'colonial' image, she is endeavouring to communicate to the review reader something more than her unflattering opinion of this particular new novel. Perhaps it is necessary to know something of *Quadrant's* editorial policy in order to understand why Green was asked to review this particular novel but her message becomes clearer in the penultimate paragraph of her review where it becomes apparent that her usual

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<sup>25</sup> More details about the Traditional Market Agreement can be found in Chapter 1.

<sup>26</sup> Sutherland, p74. (McCullough herself makes the point in her novel about Australians being great readers.)

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Green, 'Porn Birds', *Quadrant*, July 1977. p70.

reading matter is not popular romantic fiction 'aimed deliberately at the American middle-to-lowbrow audience, in particular the American housewife':

No doubt strenuous efforts will be made to justify the expense, and the unholy alliance between advertisers, journalists and education departments will exert its influence to persuade that bad is good. The conspiracy of silence about the masterpieces of English literature which this trinity has brought about means that each generation of school leavers is less able than the last to tell the difference between diamonds and glass beads. Those who have not been told about George Eliot can be conditioned to think well of Colleen McCullough.<sup>28</sup>

That conditioning of readers often starts when a novel, new on the market, is compared to a proven bestseller to persuade readers to buy it despite the fact, evident to any reader, that the two books have few similarities apart from their listing in the same popular fiction genre grouping; in this case, romantic family saga. *The Thorn Birds* followed that trend by being promoted as the 'new' *Gone With the Wind* (as had *Cashelmara* by Susan Howatch in 1974 and *Csardas* by Diane Pearson in 1975 before it), 'a label which seems to have irritated McCullough intensely, as well it might since her own authorial professionalism is in stark contrast to Mitchell's small-town amateurism'.<sup>29</sup> However, in turn, *The Thorn Birds* was used to promote other new books such as Barbara Taylor Bradford's *A Woman of Substance* and Reay Tannahill's *A Dark and Distant Shore*. It is a practice that the publishers continue to use so it must be an effective ploy as a means of promotion, although there are times when one has to query why one book is linked to another. For example, Robert L. Ross, in the *Journal of Popular Culture*,<sup>30</sup> acclaims Xavier Herbert's 1975 *Poor Fellow My Country* in preference to *The Thorn Birds* because it 'celebrates the landscape of the outback'. In his article he is wondering why Herbert's book, which is about the dispossession of the Aborigines and the despoiling of the land, was not as successful as McCullough's in America considering the interest at that time in native Australians whom McCullough, in 1977, hardly

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<sup>28</sup> Green, p72.

<sup>29</sup> Sutherland, p77.

<sup>30</sup> Robert L Ross, 'Xavier Herbert's, *Poor Fellow My Country*: In search of an American Audience', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol 23:2, 1989.

mentions. He answers his own queries though when he refers to its great length (1,463 pages of close type), the protagonist's unacceptable social, political and racial views, and its anti-Americanism. But perhaps he too was looking for the answer to Dorothy Green's question , as he says:

Wouldn't those millions of Americans who thrilled to the saga of *The Thorn Birds* find *Poor Fellow My Country* equally exciting to say nothing of the fact that they would be reading a book by a genuine novelist.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, *The Thorn Birds* also 'celebrates the landscape of the outback' with some very fine descriptions of the flora and fauna, although a few may read like extracts from a tourist brochure, but her emphasis is elsewhere which becomes apparent when one reads the preface to her story. The preface takes the form of an italicised 'legend' which features intermittently throughout the book:

There is a legend about a bird which sings just once in its life, more sweetly than any other creature on the face of the earth. From the moment it leaves the nest it searches for a thorn tree, and does not rest until it has found one. Then, singing among the savage branches, it impales itself upon the longest, sharpest spine. And, dying, it rises above its own agony to out-carol the lark and the nightingale. One superlative song, existence the price. But the whole world stills to listen, and God in His heaven smiles. For the best is only bought at the cost of great pain.... Or so says the legend.

Dorothy Green, who in referring to *The Thorn Birds* as a commodity putting it in the same category as soap, says of the epigraph:

The epigraph to the novel and the reference to the epigraph on the last page are the author's salute to the Higher Plane, but nothing that goes on in between has the slightest connection with the epigraph. It is there, like the words "hormone", "bio", and "placental" on face cream tubes, to deceive the purchaser into thinking she has bought a quality product.<sup>32</sup>

K. A. McKenzie has some sympathy with that view when he/she says that the treatment of the proposition which is 'implicit in the title and explicit in the epigraph....is amateurish and

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Green, p70.

confused, partly because the analogy between birds and human beings is necessarily inexact'.<sup>33</sup> John Sutherland assumes that the 'legend' is invented by McCullough and goes on to suggest that she based her 'legend' on the popular fallacy that a mother pelican tears her breast to feed her young, or on the swan-song (the song fabled to be sung by a dying swan), but he is the only writer of those who accept it as an intrinsic part of the narrative, who questions its veracity rather than accepting it as an old Celtic legend. Perhaps this is something to do with his sex; Cora Kaplan says: 'I don't know a single man who has read it except to engage with it professionally'.<sup>34</sup> However, whether it is a Celtic legend or not, there is such a bird as a thorn bird but it does not fit in with McCullough's legendary definition.<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hood, in his poem *The Plea to the Midsummer Fairies* (1827), came close to it when he wrote: 'The bird forlorn/ That singeth with her breast against a thorn', but this is traditionally thought to be a description of a nightingale.

The debate surrounding the 'legend' focuses on what it is thought to mean. Sutherland thinks it is 'directly genital....the suggestion of feminine surrender to the victimizing phallus is transparent';<sup>36</sup> and Heather Wearne says: 'This legend essentializes women's existence, and invites a celebration of female masochism. According to the legend, it is woman's nature endlessly to see sexual/death fulfilment through consummation with the male phallus-thorn',<sup>37</sup> but seeing the 'thorn' as the male phallus is rather an easy and simplistic explanation, though with some justification. I prefer to interpret it as 'a thorn in the flesh' - a source of continual grief - and I believe McCullough is thinking in a similar vein when she has the character Meggie say: 'Each of us has something within us which won't be denied,

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<sup>33</sup> K A McKenzie, 'The Logic of The Thorn Birds', *Overland*, Vol 73, 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Cora Kaplan, 'The Thorn Birds: Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity', *Sea Changes: Essays of Culture and Feminism*, London: Verso, 1986. p120.

<sup>35</sup> Thorn-bird: South American, *Anumbius Acuticaudatus*, which builds a large domed nest of thorny twigs.

<sup>36</sup> Sutherland, p78.

<sup>37</sup> Heather Wearne, 'Contemporary Culture, Romance Fiction and *The Thorn Birds*', *Meanjin*, Vol 51 (1), 1992. p175.

even if it makes us scream aloud to die' (p438).<sup>38</sup> There is also a religious connection which I feel is quite apposite in the context of this book: 2 *Corinthians* 12:7 'a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me'.

That last quote is particularly relevant to the earliest protagonist in McCullough's story, Mary Carson, who has the millions and the property and the religious connections that provide the initial causation for the subsequent narrative. She is a vindictive, jealous, frustrated old woman who is portrayed as the 'messenger of Satan', the serpent in the Garden of Eden that is Drogheda, her home. All the main characters, particularly the women, have 'thorns that in [their] bosom lodge' and it is in exploring these 'thorns' that the story unfolds. One of the dust jacket blurbs describes the story thus:

*The Thorn Birds* is a robust, romantic saga of three generations. It begins in the early years of this century when Paddy Cleary moves his wife, Fiona, and their seven children to Drogheda: an Australian sheep station, a quarter of a million well-stocked acres, owned by his autocratic and childless older sister. For more than half a century we follow their fates, until Justine O'Neill, the brilliant actress, finally comes to terms with a life on the other side of the globe and Drogheda ceases to haunt her.

The central figures in this acutely observed story are Justine's mother, the indomitable Meggie, the only Cleary daughter; and the one man she truly loves, Ralph de Bricassart. He is stunningly handsome, ambitious - and a priest. His course takes him far from his remote Outback parish to the halls of the Vatican, while Meggie is fixed to the Drogheda that is part of her bones - but the distance that shapes their lives does not dim their feelings.

As background to the Cleary family's lives there is the land itself: stark, relentless in its demands, brilliant in its flowering, prey to gigantic cycles of drought and flood, rich when nature is bountiful. It is like no other place on earth, and binds fast those who have known it, however hard they try to break its hold.<sup>39</sup>

This is a surprisingly restrained synopsis, which is almost the same as the blurb on the original Harper & Row edition though the word order is changed in places, considering the amount of money the publishers spent on promoting it. Blurb tends to reflect the enthusiastic verbalisations of the promotional team's ideas of the fiction's salient points and the resultant

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<sup>38</sup> All page references to the text of *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough refer to the Warner Books 1995 paperback edition.

<sup>39</sup> Dust jacket blurb from the 1977 Book Club Associates hardback edition. From this blurb, especially the last paragraph, it is understandable why *The Thorn Birds* was promoted as the 'new' *Gone With the Wind*.

bombastic prose is not always a good indication of the author's emphasis on a particular aspect of the narrative. Michael Demarest, writing in *Time* soon after publication is, however, even more succinct:

The novel, set in McCullough's native Australia, follows three generations of an Outback family through two continents, 54 years and 280,000 words. A riveting evocation of time, place and character, it was pounded out at night while the author worked by day in the Yale university neurology lab.<sup>40</sup>

*The Thorn Birds* is a 591 page family saga broken up into seven segments covering a period of fifty-four years. Each section covers a set number of years and concentrates slightly more on the named character for that section. That character is in one way or another related to the Cleary family, around whom the story centres. It is set first briefly in New Zealand, then on Drogheda station in northern New South Wales, Australia, with sorties by some of the characters to north Queensland, Rome, Athens, London, and Crete, and short interludes of war in north Africa and New Guinea. The bulk of the story is set in Australia, at Drogheda. Especially important are the three Cleary women: Fee, her daughter Meggie and her daughter Justine, whose emancipation from the restrictive patriarchal society that enslaved her grandmother, and to a certain extent her mother, is clearly outlined from her birth onwards.

As an unmarried mother, Fiona (Fee) is 'sold' by her father, a New Zealand Protestant colonial aristocrat, to Paddy Cleary, the shy, hardworking, penniless, Irish dairyhand who worked on his farm, to legitimise the child, Frank, and to save the Armstrong family's embarrassment. Fee is the only daughter among the fifteen children her mother bore and from her ten pregnancies she in her turn has eight sons and only one daughter Meghan (Meggie). Meggie, however, has only two children: Justine, by her husband, Luke O'Neill, and Dane, by the love of her life, Ralph de Bricassart, a Roman Catholic priest.

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Demarest, 'The Hot New Rich', *Time*, 13 June 1977. p44-51.



Paddy's sister, Mary Carson, had married a very wealthy Australian 'squatter'.<sup>41</sup> After his death and the death of his son, she decides to send for her much younger brother from New Zealand, with his large family of sons to work on Drogheda for low wages as her stockmen, and to live in expectation of finally inheriting the property after her death. A malicious, jealous woman, and more than a little in love with her parish priest, Father Ralph, who is exceptionally handsome and inordinately ambitious, she wills her fortune and Drogheda worth thirteen million pounds to the Catholic Church on condition that Ralph is allowed to manage the assets. Knowing about his ambitions and his fondness for the Cleary family, particularly Meggie, she has purposely placed him in a very difficult situation. He has to decide whether he is a man or a priest. As a man he cannot deny Paddy his rightful property especially since he has come to love Meggie, but as a priest he cannot deny his Church, which he professes to love above all, the riches which will enable him to become a cardinal. Ralph of course takes the money; he has sold Meggie, he tells her guiltily, for thirteen million pieces of silver.

As Ralph is elevated through the ranks of the Church, with the help of his inheritance, far away from Drogheda, he tries to deny his love for Meggie. Returning at times of crisis, such as fire, drought, deaths and birth, he succumbs to temptation on more than one occasion and makes love to Meggie. Dane is born as a result of their liaison, although Ralph is convinced Meggie's husband is the father until it is too late for him to acknowledge his son. Meggie believes she has cheated the God whose claim on Ralph is greater than hers, by stealing a part of him that she can keep and treasure, but God is not defeated. Dane is drowned soon after he too becomes a priest. Everyone that Meggie loves, dies: her father, her brothers Hal and Stu, her son, and finally her lover. Her adored eldest brother is imprisoned for years; she is just a chattel of her husband and her life, on the whole, is like her mother's, one of

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<sup>41</sup> A person who squats on vast tracts of the Outback and eventually claims it as his own.

drudgery and hard work. Yet the novel is marketed as a love story, as a romance; the sort of story that is supposed to have a happy ending.

At least four of the Smithton group of women with whom Radway explored the act of reading romances, referred to *The Thorn Birds* as 'depressing' even though they considered it a good example of a story that technically qualified as a romance.

When urged to specify what made the story pessimistic, none cited specific events in the plot or the death of the hero. Rather they referred to the general tenor of the story and to the fact that the characters were poor. "Too much suffering," one reader concluded.<sup>42</sup>

The 'technical qualification' that the Smithton women look for in a good romance is 'an intelligent and able heroine who finds a man who recognises her special qualities and is capable of loving and caring for her as she wants to be loved'<sup>43</sup> - the very qualities that Justine and her lover Rainer portray. The chronicle of the three generations of Cleary women from Fee through Meggie to Justine mirrors in social terms an advance from the type of slavery that was Fee's early married life to the freedom that Justine enjoys on near equal terms in a man's world. She has left her home to enter the sophisticated world of career women and has independently chosen a man to love and cherish her in a way denied to both her mother and grandmother.<sup>44</sup> Thus she fulfils one of the most important 'qualifications' for the ending of a good romance by getting married, although this is in direct contrast to the character of Justine for her to be the one that causes a conventional happy ending.

It seems as if *The Thorn Birds* conventional happy ending is added as an afterthought.

Thirty-two of Radway's group of 42 Smithton romance readers put 'a happy ending' as one of

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<sup>42</sup> Radway, p99.

<sup>43</sup> Radway, p54.

<sup>44</sup> According to the Smithton group a good/ideal heroine must have three traits: intelligence, a sense of humour, and independence. Radway, p77. And according to Fowler the heroine 'has become the quintessential self-made woman... is an active figure, the innovator in production.' p104. Thus, Justine appears to qualify.

the top three necessities for a 'good' romance<sup>45</sup> but having a happy ending does not necessarily qualify the novel as a 'good' romance if the storyline beforehand has not followed their ideal romance formula.<sup>46</sup> The real ending to *The Thorn Birds* is death: death of the hero, death of Ralph's son Dane, and the death of Drogheda because there is no future Cleary generation. Only the women are left, without hope and without a future. Therefore the Smithton group are right. It is depressing and there is a lot of suffering.<sup>47</sup> Veronica Brady comments on the 'general lovelessness of a book that purports to be a love story'<sup>48</sup> in a damning critical assessment of a novel that 'caters for neurotics, for the regressive desire to retreat from reality into an infantile world of ready-made values and irresponsible sensation'.<sup>49</sup> She is concerned about what the success of *The Thorn Birds* represents. She sees it as the decadence of language and the decadence of feeling. She selects examples of 'silly' writing, such as the episodes where Stu is killed by a wild boar (p230) and where Ralph takes Meggie to bed (p354); and the reader's introduction to Australia and 'the remarkable priest' (p67) she sees as 'disturbing for its calm acceptance of force as a way of life'. After elaborating on this passage she says:

The military metaphors and the reference to Cromwell and to imperial power and malevolence also point to a fascination with authority of a totalitarian kind. There is no conception of trust here, no notion of moral obligation either between ruler and ruled or between human beings and the world. The language thus reveals the kinds of values which underlie *The Thorn Birds*, and allows us to wonder if its vogue may represent an aspect of a general regression into violence and moral obtuseness apparent today.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Radway, p67.

<sup>46</sup> Radway, p163.

<sup>47</sup> As there was in reality in 1977. Apart from the world's worst air disaster; cyclones, earthquakes and typhoons killing thousands, there was a recession in the book publishing world. To save money copyediting staff and publishing funds were cut and publishers were under pressure to abandon the fine but unprofitable authors in favour of books that they knew would be successful.

<sup>48</sup> See my introductory paragraph about formulae.

<sup>49</sup> Veronica Brady, 'Colleen McCullough and the Savage God', *Quadrant*, August 1980. p52.

<sup>50</sup> Brady, p49.

John Sutherland also refers to the 'understated but quite audible anti-English sentiment' to which Brady alludes in the above quotation and says that the 'mild xenophobia' was a good selling point. He cites two other 1970s novels (*Centennial*, James Michener, 1974, and *Trinity*, Leon Uris, 1976) as examples of similarly mildly xenophobic best sellers published a short time before *The Thorn Birds* as proof of saleability<sup>51</sup> which also helps to answer the Dorothy Green question, referred to earlier, 'Why is this particular book singled out for promotion at this particular time?'. Sutherland 'surmises' that the publishers, Harper and Low, were attracted to *The Thorn Birds* because 'like Uris's Ireland, McCullough's Australia is interestingly foreign - yet has a shared language and, in a large part, a shared cultural tradition with America'<sup>52</sup> thereby making it more appealing for American readers.

While Brady is concerned about the primitive and punitive moral sense of *The Thorn Birds*, Heather Wearne looks at it as an example of romantic fiction. As such, she argues that it is non-judgemental of women's subordination in a patriarchal society and how 'quiescence' in such a society 'is women's only hope in their struggle for happiness'.<sup>53</sup> She concludes that romantic fiction cannot offer a serious commentary on contemporary culture because it promotes passive acceptance of patriarchy. With that conclusion, using *The Thorn Birds* as an example of romantic fiction invalidates her argument somewhat because she points out in her discourse that in the Meggie/Ralph relationship there is a degree of contestation of male dominance. For example, it is Meggie who demands that Ralph recognises the primacy of love and diverts him from his priestly vows into her bed thus ensuring that he suffers for his actions as much as she does. In the end, however, Meggie's bid for power is illusive and the patriarchal status quo is maintained.

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<sup>51</sup> Sutherland, p76/77.

<sup>52</sup> Sutherland, p76/77.

<sup>53</sup> Wearne, p177.

Two feminist critics who have engaged with *The Thorn Birds* are Christine Bridgwood, who discusses 'the stoic acceptance of fate' in the novel, the 'life's like that' philosophy that validates the suffering of the female characters, which is associated with McCullough's leitmotif, the legend of the thorn bird, and Cora Kaplan who sees incest as the theme. In her essay<sup>54</sup> Bridgwood reviews the differences between a 'romance' with its conventional heterosexual closure, and the 'family saga' where such a union is often the beginning of a series of incidents enacted over a period of time, thus making the reader look beyond the generational characters to the historical and social context in which the story is set. *The Thorn Birds* follows this second model with various episodes that support the concept of progress in the short-term but, at the same time, this short-term view is overlaid with a more prominent long-term perspective, that of tradition, family, and patrimony. In this novel that contradiction is illustrated by the emancipation of the third generation female character Justine, who enjoys an autonomous lifestyle, which is in contrast to the last page where Meggie muses that 'small things grow big, change, and wither; the new little things come again in the same endless, unceasing cycle' (p591) which, along with a reiteration of the legend and its allusion to female suffering, ends the novel. Thus, Bridgwood concludes, nothing changes: the position of women in society has been explored in the short-term but 'the soothing balm of an ideology of stoical acceptance which naturalises the social and sexual status quo'<sup>55</sup> prevails.

In her long essay Cora Kaplan explores fiction, fantasy and femininity in relation to the historical rise of the popular novel before she applies these three terms to her critical evaluation of *The Thorn Birds*. She says that in long blockbuster novels such as this one, the reader is not encouraged to identify with a single female character as one would in a romance. She argues that they persuade the female reader 'to identify across sexual

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<sup>54</sup> Bridgwood, p167-193.

<sup>55</sup> Bridgwood, p178.

difference and to engage with narrative fantasy from a variety of subject positions and at various levels',<sup>56</sup> and she believes that *The Thorn Birds* 'appropriates contemporary feminist discourse on sexuality in interesting ways'.<sup>57</sup> Her view that 'incest is the only slightly displaced theme'<sup>58</sup> of *The Thorn Birds* is explored in detail in her essay. She sees the incest motif 'saturating all the literal familial relations as well as the metaphorical ones'<sup>59</sup> and as examples she cites the Meggie/'Father' Ralph relationship, the unmarried Cleary brothers who are 'quite wrapped up in Mum' (p358), Fee's special devotion to her son Frank and his to her, and the attachments between different sets of brothers and sisters. Frank is the illegitimate son of a half-Maori married New Zealand politician and it was because of Fee's affair with him that she lost her upper-class social status and was forced to marry Paddy. After quarrelling with Paddy Frank leaves home and is subsequently jailed for murder, which is seen in the novel as Fee's punishment for adultery. Meggie in turn loses her son first to the Church and then by death, which is also seen as punishment for her adultery with Ralph. There is a very close, though non-sexual, attachment between Frank and his half-sister Meggie and between Dane and his half-sister Justine, and there are hints of latent homosexual attachments between the Cleary twins Patsy and Jims; Meggie's husband Luke and his workmate Arne, and between Ralph and his Italian mentor in the Church. This blurring of the masculine and feminine positions is evident throughout the book, apart from the seduction scene - although even here the usual roles are reversed as Ralph, the virgin, is seduced by Meggie. It is at that point in the novel that the transgressive nature of the sexual differences offered to the reader are retracted says Kaplan, thus 'incest makes real men and women of us all'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kaplan, p120.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Kaplan, p136.

<sup>60</sup> Kaplan, p141.

Researching Roman Catholic views on novels like *The Thorn Birds*, with its intimations of incestuous behaviour, where the romance involves a Catholic priest has proved that there is nothing in print; the suggestion being that if such novels are ignored 'the out of sight out of mind' policy prevails. As far back as 1884 Frances Minto Elliot, in her two-volume romance *The Red Cardinal*,<sup>61</sup> was hinting (there were no graphic love scenes) about a sinful relationship involving a cardinal, so it is conceivable that such novels do not now, or have never merited any attention from the Church hierarchy.<sup>62</sup> Thomas Woodman, in his study of the Catholic novel in British literature, dismisses *The Thorn Birds* as a flamboyant modern example of the sensational combination of sex and religion. He says that Catholicism 'has always seemed to have the greatest appeal of all religions in this regard.'<sup>63</sup> Nicci Gerrard, in her book *Into the Mainstream*, discusses the subject of writers who are critical of the establishment, 'particularly Irish women writers, for whom religion means constraint and misogyny, struggle with its lingering and tenacious power over their lives. For them the Priest lurks within the Closet, spreading guilt, obsession, and a sense of loss.'<sup>64</sup> Yet, she says, there are some writers who find that 'there is a bonding and sympathy between [Irish] women that you might not find in a more "developed" country.'<sup>65</sup>

I am not suggesting that McCullough feels guilty or obsessed or even thinks about Catholicism or its priests except as the basis of good story-line but I do find the novel suffused by the ideology of the Roman Catholic Church, and at times Irish mythology, understandably perhaps, since the readers follow the career of Ralph from a lowly parish priest in the Outback to a cardinal in the Vatican in Rome. I have no knowledge of

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<sup>61</sup> Frances Minto Elliot, *The Red Cardinal*, London: F W White and Co., 1884.

<sup>62</sup> It was not only the Church who was disinterested. I had to cut the pages of the Bodleian Library's copy of *The Red Cardinal* before reading it.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Woodman, *Faithful Fictions: The Catholic Novel in British Literature*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991. p149.

<sup>64</sup> Nicci Gerrard, *Into the Mainstream*, London: Pandora, 1989. p87.

<sup>65</sup> Gerrard, p88.

McCullough's personal religion but her father was an Ulster Orangeman, who emigrated to Australia in the 1920s and her mother was a New Zealander of Irish Catholic and Maori ancestry.<sup>66</sup> It appears that she has used episodes from her own life as the basis for parts of her novel, as many family saga authors are thought to do. In 1985 an Australian magazine published an interview with McCullough in which she describes how her family worked as station hands on her Aunt Mary's property (worth three million dollars in the 1920s) before they had to leave when the aunt left her fortune to the Catholic Church, after being influenced by a handsome priest. 'My grandfather, being a staunch Catholic, wouldn't sue [neither does Paddy in her novel] and the Catholic Church just turned the family off the land. It doesn't do that in the book because I needed the handsome priest as a hero'. Her father became a cane cutter, like her character Luke, and her brother Carl drowned while rescuing two women from drowning off a beach in Crete in 1965, the news of which was broken to her in a telephone call from an unsympathetic Australia House official while she was in London.<sup>67</sup> Both of these events are also portrayed. However, McCullough, says that when she decided to write *The Thorn Birds* it was 'a hard -headed decision to appeal to popular taste, particularly American popular taste, because that was where the money lay',<sup>68</sup> although, says Willye Bell Udosen, through her 'onomastics' she has provided 'a penetrating analysis of Roman Catholicism' as well as shown 'a covert support of Women's Liberation'.<sup>69</sup>

The story opens on Meggie's fourth birthday, the eighth of December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, which celebrates the belief that Mary, the Mother of God, was born without the stain of original sin. She 'christens' her birthday doll, the first she has ever had,

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<sup>66</sup> Gwen Morris, 'An Australian Ingredient in American Soap: *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol 24 (4), Spring 1991. p60.

<sup>67</sup> 'Colleen McCullough can't help being a millionaire', *Good Weekend*, Sidney, May 4-5 1985. pp8-12.

<sup>68</sup> Morris, p60.

<sup>69</sup> Willye Bell Udosen, 'Names and Symbols of Characters in *The Thorn Birds*', *Papers of N. Central Names Institute*, Vol 4, 1983. pp43-65.



Agnes, because it is 'the only name she knew elegant enough for such a peerless creature' (p13), but McCullough might know that St Agnes is the Patron Saint of virgins, who was martyred at the age of thirteen because she vowed to consecrate her body to Christ and thus rejected all suitors. While Meggie is tenderly cradling her first doll, it is snatched from her and 'violated' by her brothers. According to my interpretation, substitute Jesus for the doll and the readers get an image of His crucifixion and death: being mocked by the crowd, His clothes torn, and the crown of thorns ('a wire rod that cruelly pierced her [His] head') (p19), while Meggie/Mary looks on helplessly and cries, which is symbolism for the suffering of women; suffering in the religious sense of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, and suffering in the secular sense through their position as being subservient to men, especially in 1915 when the novel opens. McCullough reinforces this opening sequence again after Dane is conceived. Meggie tells her friend Anne that she will love Ralph's baby 'with the purity of the Blessed Mother herself.' 'Ah, [Anne replied] but did she love purely? The object of her love was struck down in the very fullness of His flower, wasn't He?' (p362) The whole scene brings to mind the words of the legend 'For the best is only bought at the cost of great pain'; and the reader is reminded of this scene and the crucifixion scenario again when Dane, Meggie's son, is dying: 'a terrible pain blossomed in his chest, surely as a spear would feel, one long and red-hot shaft of screaming agony.' (p542) However, by this emblematic opening sequence I believe McCullough is laying down the foundation for the final outcome.

One has to consider whether McCullough is working through her own childhood in the hands of nuns. Convent schools are particularly lambasted especially the one the Cleary children attend in New Zealand when they are still very poor and without the protection of a handsome priest with good financial connections. Here the nuns are sadistic, especially in regard to Meggie who has red hair, which is considered unlucky, and she is also left-handed, which is thought to mean she has 'the mark of the devil', so she is beaten until she learns to write with her right hand. Religion is based on fear, fear of the vengeful God but when the family move to Australia things are very different. Stu and Meggie, the only two young

enough to go to school, as the niece and nephew of the very wealthy Mary Carson and the protégés of Father de Bricassart, are fawned on by the nuns. Throughout the narrative McCullough makes the readers aware that money breeds power. Where money is concerned the Church has no scruples as she chronicles Ralph's rise in its hierarchy with the inducement of Mary Carson's thirteen million pounds. He breaks all his vows and admits it to his comfort loving superior and mentor. With the millions increasing all the time he is easily forgiven, yet a young priest, without financial protection, who falls in love, is banished to the outback. The palatial quality of the Vatican and the life of the 'Princes' of the Church is shown in sharp contrast to the hard life of the men working on the Drogheda station, who provide the money which keeps them in that lifestyle, and the readers are rarely given any indication as to what the churchmen actually do with their time, which suggests that McCullough's sympathies lie with the station workers particularly if her biographical details are taken into consideration.

By giving Mary Carson the name 'Mary' McCullough is being facetious. She is the very antithesis of the 'Blessed Mother'; she is the serpent with the tempting 'apple' in the form of thirteen million pounds, the 'snake in the grass', the hypocritical enemy, the disguised danger, in the Garden of Eden, the rose garden of Drogheda, where Ralph and Meggie (Adam and Eve) have their love scenes but from which they are always driven. There are overtones of the underworld in another part of the garden where there is a borehole pool, away from the roses, with its sulphurous fumes, where deaths are presaged. It is the roses, which feature over and over again either sentimentally, or as a disguise, for example, when masses of them are piled on top of Mary Carson's hastily made coffin to hide the stench of the unusually rapid putrefaction of her body - more mythical allusions relating to worms and maggots and cantankerous individuals.<sup>70</sup> Ashes of roses is the colour of Meggie's first party

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<sup>70</sup> When 'cantankerous' (p146) Mary Carson dies and her body putrifies so quickly I feel that McCullough might have abbreviated that word to 'cankorous' in her mind as an explanation for that happening.

dress worn at Mary Carson's birthday party, the night she dies, and it is while wearing that dress that Ralph recognises her as a woman for the first time. Roses, the rose garden, the dried and pressed rose Ralph keeps in his breviary, ashes of roses, all are linked to Meggie, and the unpriestlike feelings he has for her. Yet he does little to deny them, or is the rose in his breviary, his thorn, his daily communication with it a test of his resolve to stay in the Church?

Prior to the period when McCullough was writing her novel a Gallup Poll had shown that 75 per cent of those questioned felt that the influence of religion was declining in the US. Five years later another Gallop Poll in 1974 showed that although 40 per cent of US adults attended church services weekly Roman Catholic attendance was down to 55 per cent from 70 per cent in 1963, so McCullough's liberal attitude to her clerical hero's unchaste activities were possibly not seen as too scandalous. Her progressive views in that area contrast sharply with what appears to be her defence of the compromise the Church made with the Nazis during the war. This part of her story may be her personal judgement of history, although she remains true to the idea of the hero, however flawed, being heroic because she has Ralph behave honourably throughout that episode. But, it has to be remembered, McCullough set out to write a bestseller therefore any personal opinion she may have on any aspect of history has to be subjugated to the demands of the story, and its eventual readers.

There is some confusion as to whether McCullough is writing about a priest or a man who happens to be a priest because apart from his officiating at the funerals and the mention of saying Mass at Drogheda, his allegiance to his religion in Australia is in doubt at all times. The Catholic Church teaches children from their earliest schooldays to always think of others before themselves, but Ralph defies this teaching throughout; it is 'me first' at all times. Why? What is it about him that makes him determined to stay a priest? Is McCullough hinting at the reasons for his behaviour when she gives the readers details of Ralph's background when she tells us that he is the second son of an ancient Irish aristocratic

family? By tradition in these families, the eldest son inherits everything and, also by tradition, the second son enters the Church or the Army. For Ralph there appears to have been no choice; he entered a seminary at the age of seventeen. 'How could they rear me from infancy to think you profanation' he says to himself when making love to Meggie for the first time (p354) thus giving the readers a reason for doubting his vocation and excusing his faults. The Church is his life. He has known no other. Its absolute rules make him feel secure, secure also in the knowledge that if he fails he will be forgiven, not only because that is what the Church teaches, but because his wealth has made him sacrosanct.

Gwen Morris perhaps has captured the spirit of the book when she says:

Australians love putting people on. The secret Australian ingredient in *The Thorn Birds* is Australian humor. McCullough presented the American public with a book which is an amalgam of American literary styles - a cross between a jeremiad, a western, a nineteenth century sentimental novel, and a light romance, in short a classic American soap.... Colleen McCullough has fooled the American reading public. In *The Thorn Birds* she is quietly pulling the collective American leg.<sup>71</sup>

When Warner Brothers bought the film rights to *The Thorn Birds* in 1977 three film directors in a row (Herbert Ross, Arthur Hiller and Peter Weir) spent three years trying to reduce it to feature length. Having failed they offered it to Warner Brothers Television who made it into a mini-series which was first shown on American television (ABC) in 1983.<sup>72</sup> Adapting any novel for the screen where so many of the novel's characters' thoughts are internal and expressed by means other than action, the process of dramatising them is difficult. Viewers want action, so internal thoughts in *The Thorn Birds* have to be externalised in the form of dramatic conflict, such as the confrontations between Paddy and Frank and new material is added to give the viewer some of the atmosphere of the book. Drogheda is a sheep station and the reader knows this without having to have the word 'sheep' constantly mentioned but for the viewer, sheep have to be seen, so the scriptwriter,

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<sup>71</sup> Morris, p67.

<sup>72</sup> Bruce Bawer, 'The Thorn Birds', *Emmy*, March/April, 1982. p46.

Carmen Culver, creates a sheep-shearing contest, which also gives a reason for the sheep-shearing 'cathedral' size shed where so much of the emotional action in the film takes place. Besides highlighting the arduous work of a shearer, Culver is also able to add weight to the character of Luke O'Neill, Meggie's husband. She shows up the unpleasant macho side of his character so that when Meggie eventually leaves him, in a scene very different from McCullough's, the viewer has little sympathy for him. This all helps to keep the viewer supporting the Ralph/Meggie relationship. 'You try to do the best you can to remain loyal to the property, but not at the expense of the drama.'<sup>73</sup> One has to constantly remember that with a mini-series there has to be a big enough drama at the end of each episode to persuade the viewer to tune in again.

The semi-erotic blurb on the video boxes alerts the reader of the book to the fact that the film is based on the novel and therefore the reader must be prepared for dramatic interludes that may conflict with McCullough's version:

*The Thorn Birds*; an epic saga of unrequited love and tormented passion, based on Colleen McCullough's world-wide best-selling novel.

Sin by sin they broke the Ten Commandments to taste the agonising fruit of forbidden ecstasy. Father Ralph de Bricassart sold his guilty soul to inherit Drogheda, the richest farm in the Australian outback, for a chance to walk the Vatican corridors of power and ambition. But a stolen desire for Meggie Cleary sealed his mortal fate. Because her unhappy destiny tore into his sacred vows making him pay the ultimate price - the life of his bastard son.

As implied in the blurb, the film centres on the love affair of Ralph and Meggie. It omits the initial New Zealand part of the story and starts with the arrival of the Cleary family in Australia being met by Father de Bricassart, and the introduction to Drogheda. To the reader of the novel many of the changes made, such as Frank not being obviously different from his brothers and cutting the size of the family, thus omitting the twins' experiences in the war, are irrelevant because of the film's change of emphasis. Also there is the time factor with

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<sup>73</sup> Bawer, p23.

which the original film directors had battled for three years and even a six hour mini-series is limited by the constraints of the television companies.

McCullough's version of Mary Carson's death and will reading is changed because so much of the text is concerned with Ralph's inner turmoil. In dramatising it, the lawyer reads the will and the letter Mary leaves Ralph and then pleads with Ralph to destroy them before the funeral. During the service Culver has Ralph quote from Matthew, 6:21 'Where your treasure is there will be your heart', which indicates to the viewer that Ralph has decided to keep the money, but it also alludes to his feelings for Meggie in a coded form for the viewer only. The money-grabbing facet of Ralph's character is given additional significance here because in the film Paddy actually says he is disappointed that he does not get Mary's money, then there is a definite pause in the action before he goes on to say that he only wanted it on behalf of his wife Fee. Thus the viewer is prompted into seeing Ralph as not quite the perfect hero, and Culver does the same with the heroine Meggie, changing the text sufficiently to show a spiteful side of her when she visits Frank in prison, telling him that his adored mother would not visit him. Presumably Culver felt this added drama but it is at time like that that one has to remember that the film is 'based' on the book.

Unless the viewer or reader is familiar with the regalia of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, the film can have far greater impact on the viewer in some respects than the book has on the reader. Take Ralph's clothes, the reader knows Ralph is a priest and that he wears a cassock, and whenever he goes to Drogheda he seems to have a shirt, riding breeches and boots on underneath it so that when he wants to ride or do un-priestly things with Meggie the clerical apparel is easily discarded. Readers are aware that this situation continues throughout the book as Ralph moves up the Church hierarchy but although they are told about the different colour a cardinal wears, there is no indication that it is anything other than a red cassock. I believe the film adds a greater dimension to the fact that he is breaking all his vows by showing us that as he goes from bishop to archbishop, and archbishop to

cardinal, not only does he change the colour of his cassock but he has to wear broad sashes over it, as well as conspicuous crosses on heavy chains, short capes, a skullcap and a jewelled ring. Thus, at first it is easy to sin, just one simple black cassock to discard but as time goes on the viewer particularly is aware that he is making a more conscious decision to sin because more and more layers have to be stripped off to find the man underneath. The financial analogy, which I particularly favour, is hard to miss; from black to red, from credit to overdrawn; from a single mistake to outright fraud. However, readers might be drawn to the 'scarlet woman' analogy because sins are traditionally scarlet.

Another aspect that the film depicts for the viewers in a different form from that for the readers of the book, is the suggestion of the quasi-incestuous relationship between Meggie and Ralph. In the film Meggie calls Ralph 'Father', as in Father Ralph de Bricassart and to the viewer this is acceptable as Ralph is either visibly in his cassock or he is being addressed formally. For the reader, however, who knows the true feelings of both of them the cassock is invisible. The reader is also aware of the times when Ralph has acted as a mother and a father to her.

Circumstances are somewhat similar with the relationship between Ralph and Dane. The readers and viewers both know that they are father and son, but Ralph and Dane are possibly the only characters of note who are not aware of this, so it is very poignant when Dane calls Ralph 'Father' and Ralph calls Dane 'Son'. There is added pathos because if either or both of them had knowledge of their relationship before their deaths it would have irreparably destroyed them, as Ralph's death proved.

When Culver was scripting *The Thorn Birds*, she felt that the epigraphic 'legend' was the key to the meaning of the book and decided that her views as to its significance were

synonymous with Catholic theology: 'Are our lives fated or do we have free will; can we change?'<sup>74</sup> and as she tried to stress this theme, she changed parts of the text to fit in with American sensibilities. She changed the dialogue at the time of Justine's birth; instead of Ralph saying: 'Save Meggie and to hell with the baby', as he does in the book (p326), when the doctor asked what he should do in the event of his only being able to save either the baby or the mother, he says: 'If I were the husband, I think I couldn't bear to sacrifice her for anything'. The reason Culver gives for the change is that: 'I think every mother in America would hate him for saying what he does in the book'. Since neither version is compatible with Catholic teaching, which says the baby has to be saved at the expense of the mother if necessary, I do not think Culver justifies her change. Later on, however, she changes the dialogue when Meggie leaves Luke and it is perfectly understandable why American women would have been 'infuriated' by the book version because Meggie says very little, whereas Culver has her impugn Luke's sexual prowess in front of all his cane cutting cronies. One can imagine all female viewers applauding that piece of bravado, especially since Culver had already introduced a scene which made Luke an unsympathetic character.

As well as referring to the wool-shed as a 'cathedral' Culver also introduces more obvious biblical references to accompany the Catholic theme. Paddy is killed by a bush fire (p219) and in the book there is a very vivid description of the fire and Paddy's internalised dilemma about the fate of his horse, which is tied up and therefore not able to save itself, and of his accompanying dogs, but Culver decided to portray Paddy as 'the Good Shepherd' rescuing a sheep which is tangled in a thorn bush. She felt that the image of the burning bush rescue said more about Paddy as a caring man. It also brought sheep back into the viewer's perspective again, but this perhaps was a mistake particularly for Australian viewers, because the type of sheep used in the film were the wrong breed. Morris writes amusingly about other 'mistakes'; not necessarily film ones, such as those made by McCullough as an

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<sup>74</sup> Bawer, p46.



Australian writing to suit Americans, where she has 'American customs and language transposed to the Australian bush'.<sup>75</sup>

Another 'mistake' Sutherland thinks McCullough makes, is the poor quality of her writing when it comes to the love scenes in the *The Thorn Birds*. He ends his chapter by quoting, as an example, the occasion when Meggie and Ralph make love on Matlock Island, (p354) and then he quotes the reason McCullough gave for the scene which she said was 'produced....under duress':

My editor told me that the second half of the book needed a damn good love scene, and there is nothing I dislike writing more. Love-making is such a non-verbal thing, I hate that explicit 'he stuck it in her' kind of thing because it is boring. You can only say 'he stuck it in her' so many ways.<sup>76</sup>

However, it would appear that the film more than makes up for McCullough's supposed shortcomings in the descriptive sexual passages because it is the Matlock Island episode in the mini-series that is borrowed from the video section of the public library more often than any of the others. Still, there will always be disagreements between viewers and readers, scriptwriters and directors, reviewers and critics, and the author possibly with all of them, so no one is entirely happy with the end result of an adaptation.

'The vogue of *The Thorn Birds* is over now' said Veronica Brady in 1980 but Cora Kaplan and Christine Bridgwood were writing about the book in 1986, Laxmi Parasuram in 1990,<sup>77</sup> Gwen Morris in 1991, and Heather Wearne in 1992. Brady may have believed she was right in 1980 but subsequent evidence proves her wrong. The book, reprinted again in paperback in 1995, still remains popular with readers and the video with viewers, which is why, of course, critics and commentators continue to write about it. The international popularity of

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<sup>75</sup> Morris, p66.

<sup>76</sup> Sutherland, p81 (quoting from *The Guardian*, 15 April 1977).

<sup>77</sup> Laxmi Parasuram, 'The Thorn Birds: and Australian Odyssey', *Journal of Australian Literature*, Vol 1 (1), 1990. A review of the novel.

*The Thorn Birds*, or a derivative, has been somewhat guaranteed because it has been foreshortened to 3,000 words as an advanced text for foreign students<sup>78</sup> and there was even a sequel to the film, with the script written by David Stevens, made in Australia in 1995 called *The Thorn Birds: The Missing Years*.<sup>79</sup> This was shown on television in Britain during the World Cup in 1998 as an antidote to football - probably because it was a cheap way of keeping non-football viewers (traditionally women) happy.

Yet, despite all the cultural changes in all our lives the female romance reader remains elusive and the lure of romantic popular fiction remains inexplicable to many, mostly male, critics and academics. Radway, concluding her chapter on 'The Readers and Their Romances', has perhaps found the answer when she says: 'the romance's short-lived therapeutic value, which is made both possible and necessary by a culture that creates needs in women that it cannot fulfill, is finally the cause of its repetitive consumption.'<sup>80</sup> Reading, whatever the text, is usually a solitary occupation that can be enjoyed by most people and if a woman wants to read romantic fiction like *The Thorn Birds* thereby shutting out the world around her, and then feels better as a result, who has the right to tell her otherwise?

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<sup>78</sup> Colleen McCullough, *The Thorn Birds*, retold by Ann Ward, London: Penguin, 1995. A Level 6 publication.

<sup>79</sup> Megan Clarke, Warner Roadshow Studios, personal email, 28 September 1999.

<sup>80</sup> Radway, p85.

## CHAPTER 6

### *The Satanic Verses*

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

On September 26, 1988, when Salman Rushdie had his book *The Satanic Verses* published by Viking Penguin the belief in the validity of Article 19 was severely tested by many different sections of society worldwide as it became one of the most unread bestsellers in the history of publishing, just as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was reputed to be in 1960. To follow *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Thorn Birds* with *The Satanic Verses* as my third choice of book and to find a link between them, apart from the distinctive methods by which they were making themselves bestsellers, appears to be unlikely, although *The Thorn Birds* and *The Satanic Verses* both have the power of a religion as a significant ingredient in their storylines. But finding specific links between the four books chosen is not the primary aim; the aim is to provide diversity and evidence of change in the publishing business, although there is a particularly strong connection between *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Satanic Verses*. They share the same publisher, both have censorship issues, and both are reputed to be bestsellers on the basis of a few pages of each text. Both books have sold enough copies to genuinely justify the term 'bestseller' yet the media reports and many suggest that neither book was completely read, especially in the case of *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>1</sup> But there is no real evidence to support this suggestion, it is all hearsay evidence because once a book is sold there is no follow-up to see whether or not the book has been read.

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of *The Satanic Verses* in particular, many academic texts also refer to it as having minimal readership. For example, Patricia Waugh, *Harvest of the Sixties: English Literature and Its Background 1960 to 1990*, Oxford: OUP, 1995. p50.

By 1988 Britain was, in theory, a multi-cultural society although only just over five percent of the population of Britain was Black or Asian,<sup>2</sup> but racism persisted in all levels of society, as it still does today. In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie is perhaps trying to do something about it by attempting to teach his readers about Islam, about living in a multi-cultural society, and about the evils of racism, with his blend of fact and fiction. Similarly, *The Thorn Birds* had facts interspersed with its fiction, so too did *Lady Chatterley's Lover* particularly in terms of the mining industry and class division, but their issues did not have the full weight of the mass media behind them; public opinion was not canvassed to the same degree.<sup>3</sup> This was possibly because the mass communication industry was not so well developed in the 1960s and 1970s or, and more likely, because their issues were not seen by the media, who have increasingly taken on the role of moral arbiter, as so pertinent. Since nearly all fiction is based on what the author knows fact becomes part of the fiction, and it is this use of 'faction' that is the basis of the debate surrounding *The Satanic Verses*. 'The novel is the privileged area where languages in conflict can meet,' said Carlos Fuentes, 'bringing together, in tension and dialogue, not only opposing characters, but also different historical ages, social levels, civilisation and other, dawning realities of human life.'<sup>4</sup> But in 1988 this particular novel was not given the consideration of a 'privileged area'.

By the late 1980s it was becoming common practice among authors to change their literary agent. Thus, in 1987 Rushdie's new agent, the American Andrew Wylie, auctioned *The Satanic Verses* and it was bought by Peter Mayer for Viking Penguin for \$850,000, a record figure at that time for a 'literary' novel, which entitled Penguin to publish the book in Britain and the United States. However, Wylie had already sold the novel to a German and an Italian

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<sup>2</sup> The 1992 Census gave an overall figure of 5.5 per cent. Richard Hoggart, *The Way We Live Now*, London: Pimlico, 1996. First published by Chatto and Windus, 1995. p165.

<sup>3</sup> The commotion caused by the trial of *Lady Chatterley* was small scale and relatively insular compared to that of *The Satanic Verses*.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos Fuentes, 'Words Apart', *Guardian*, 24 February 1989.

publisher 'to establish the book's value in the market place'.<sup>5</sup> Written requests to the author and his agent for further information regarding the contractual arrangements for this book were unacknowledged therefore any other information about its genesis is confined to that outlined in the media, and the media coverage was, and still is, more concerned with the religious controversy this book generated than with the amount of money paid for it, unless it is mentioned in derogatory terms such as 'blood money'. Nonetheless this book was a bestseller whether read or unread and bestsellers by definition produce income for the author and profits for their publishers, although in this particular case the publisher's profits were swallowed up by unforeseen costs.

The initial English language reviews were encouraging despite Mark Lawson's comment, in the *Independent Magazine*, that he wished Rushdie had provided a 'course of running instruction' for his non-Islamic readers,<sup>6</sup> and Robert Irwin noting, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the 'alarming increase' in Rushdie's 'inventive powers'. But Irwin concluded his review with: 'It is several of the best novels he has ever written'.<sup>7</sup> D J Enright, reviewing the novel later for *The New York Review of Books*, refers to it as 'a thousand and one nights crammed into a week of evenings...A book that nobody else in Britain (at least) would have wanted to write, or could have written', and although he says that the author is 'self indulgent' his overall evaluation is favourable.<sup>8</sup> Within a month the first signs of the eventual furore generated by this book were beginning to be seen as pages deemed to be offensive by religious Muslim readers were photocopied and sent to the embassies of Islamic nations in London. This distribution had been suggested by Aslam Ejaz of the Islamic Foundation in Madras, to Faiyazuddin Ahmad in Leicester, England, following a vigorous campaign to ban

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<sup>5</sup> Ian Hamilton, 'The First Life of Salman Rushdie', *The New Yorker*, 25 December 1995/1 January 1996. p112.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Lawson, *Independent Magazine*, 10 September 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30 September 1988.

<sup>8</sup> D J Enright, *The New York Review of Books*, 2 March 1989.

the book by Muslim opposition MPs in India. They had organised rallies and demonstrations against the book after the Indian newspapers *India Today* and *Sunday* published interviews with Salman Rushdie about *The Satanic Verses* a few days prior to publication on the 26 September. On 11 October the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs was founded to mobilise public opinion in England against the novel.

Questions have been asked retrospectively about the extent to which Rushdie and his publisher, Viking Penguin, could or should have foreseen the offence this novel was to cause, the political reverberations, and the deaths and injuries that followed its publication. According to Michael Hanne in his book *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*,<sup>9</sup> Viking Penguin sought advice in Britain and India about the likely impact of the novel on Muslim religious sensibilities in the months leading up to the publication date. Hanne says that one of Viking Penguin's own editorial advisers in India, Khushwant Singh, telephoned Peter Mayer, Chairman of the Penguin Group, several times to warn against publication because of the derogatory references to the Koran, and the idea of Penguin's Indian subsidiary publishing the book under its own imprint was promptly abandoned. The publishers also submitted the novel to nine British religious scholars, Muslim, Christian and Jewish, nearly all of whom concluded that the novel would cause offence, and could not be considered as fiction because of Rushdie's use of historical figures. They also felt that the novel, if published, would do damage far beyond the control of any one person or one country.

After receiving such negative reports about the possible outcome if publishing went ahead, Hanne's supposition

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Hanne, 'Salman Rushdie: "The Satanic Verses" (1988)', *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*, Providence: Berghahn Books, 1994. p198.

...that the large advance Rushdie received from the novel (whether it was \$800,000 or, as some sources indicate, £800,000) suggests that both the author and publishers expected the level of sales which only a *succes de scandale* could guarantee for a novel whose dense style and allusive structure could otherwise attract a relatively limited audience...<sup>10</sup>

seems to have some truth in it. It would appear that Viking Penguin and Rushdie made grave judgemental errors in believing that those who protested were too unimportant and not powerful enough to have their objections taken seriously, and by letting economic considerations take priority over moral ones. Perhaps Penguin's successful pre-judgement of popular opinion twenty-eight years previously, when they had published the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, had led them to believe that the same outcome was likely again. They needed the same level of success to recoup the large advance made to Rushdie, but the ways of making one bestseller are not always applicable to another.

In the foreword to Carmel Bedford's book *Fiction, Fact and the Fatwa: 2,000 Days of Censorship*, which she wrote in 1994 whilst Secretary of the International Rushdie Defence Committee, she details many of the events leading up to pronouncement of the fatwa by the Ayatollah Khomeini such as the banning of *The Satanic Verses* on 5 October by the Indian Finance Ministry under Section 11 of the Indian Customs Act. Although this ban, they said, did not detract from the literary and artistic merit of Rushdie's work, it was deplored by nearly all the leading Indian newspapers and magazines. On 13 October Rushdie wrote an open letter to the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in *The Indian Express*, accusing his government 'of extremism and political manipulation', a point taken up by *The Economic and Political Weekly* on 22 October, supported by writers, editors and publishers, when it too accused Prime Minister Gandhi of making a political decision because of the impending November elections.

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<sup>10</sup> Hanne, p199.

At this time Rushdie was due to go to South Africa at the invitation of the *Weekly Mail* and the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), in recognition of his anti-Apartheid stance, to attend the *Weekly Mail* Book Week in Johannesburg and Cape Town to which he was going to give an address entitled: 'Wherever they burn books, they also burn people'. After Muslim groups protested and threats of violence were made, COSAW had to withdraw the invitation because they could not guarantee Rushdie's safety. On 28 October the South African Government *Gazette* announced the banning of *The Satanic Verses* under Section 47(2)b of the Publications Act, the section dealing with blasphemy. Despite the pressure and several bomb threats, the *Weekly Mail* did not withdraw its invitation because it maintained that Rushdie had been invited before the publication of *The Satanic Verses* 'due to his standing as a writer and because of his active concern over the issues of censorship'. However, Rushdie did not appear in person but participated via a phone link.

In November the governments of Bangladesh and Sudan banned *The Satanic Verses* and the general secretariat of the forty-six nation Islamic Conference Organisation 'urged member states to take strong action against the book's publisher and author if they failed to withdraw the book'. In contrast, in Britain, on 8 November, *The Satanic Verses* won the Whitbread Best Novel award after having been short-listed for the 1988 Booker Prize.

The reaction to the novel in India was not always so antagonistic. Nisha Puri, reviewing the book for *The Indian Post* on 2 October 1988, eloquently wrote: 'Like an outsize Brazilian butterfly, *The Satanic Verses* soars through its many worlds on wings of pure fire as panoramic vistas stretch before and behind us linked by a series of epiphanies.'<sup>11</sup> And Saeed Naqvi, writing in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, on 6 November, 1988, said:

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<sup>11</sup> Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, (eds), *The Rushdie File*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990. p15. (This publication was originally going to be published as *The Rushdie Dossier* by Collins but it was not considered objective enough. It was described by Barry Winkelman, managing director of Collins, as 'monotone, not monotonous, but just 90



The most annoying thing about the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* is that it makes Indian Muslims out to be a bunch of humourless touch-me-nots, intolerant of elegant verse or an irreverent idea;... describe the Battle of the Boyne as a piece of fiction. The Orange Order will take your pants off and give you three hundred not lashes, but John Lobbs on your bare bottoms. Try producing *The Merchant of Venice* in Jerusalem or even on Broadway and the publishers of *The Satanic Verses* will break the contract.

In December, protest followed protest in Britain wherever there were sizeable Muslim populations, organised by the Islamic Defence Council, and on 14 December the government of Sri Lanka joined the growing clique of countries to ban the book. But it was on 14 January 1989 that the protests burst fully into public consciousness when Muslims in Bradford, Yorkshire, burned a copy of *The Satanic Verses* in front of television cameras in order to draw attention to their resentment. Pakistan's National Assembly followed this by banning the novel on 8 February which led to a series of riots in Bombay and Dhaka. The televised burning brought the controversy worldwide attention and the protests became increasingly violent, particularly on the 12 February when a large mob in Iran attacked the American Culture Centre in Islamabad in protest at the forthcoming publication of the book in the USA. The police opened fire on the protesters, who were throwing bricks and stones, killing five people and injuring many others. This too was televised throughout the world as yet another person was killed and over one hundred injured, during a riot in Kashmir on 13 February.<sup>12</sup>

'Someone able to read one sentence is able to read all; more important, that reader has now the possibility of reflecting upon that sentence, of acting upon it, of giving it meaning' says Alberto Manguel in his history of reading.<sup>13</sup> But, in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, it is

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per cent recent *Guardian* and *Independent* articles'. The authors believed that the contract was cancelled because of the death threats. *The Bookseller*, 5 May 1989. p1541.)

<sup>12</sup> Carmel Bedford, *Fiction, Fact and the Fatwa: 2,000 Days of Censorship*, ARTICLE 19, 1994. pX.

<sup>13</sup> Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, London: Flamingo, 1997. First published by HarperCollins 1996. p281.

generally believed that very few of the protesters had read even one sentence; they believed what the instigators of the violence told them. Rushdie could not have foreseen the burning of his book but it did have dreadful historical significance because from the earliest papyrus scrolls to the books of today the burning of books has been a form of censorship. No evidence is available about what Rushdie had been proposing to say in his address to the South Africans entitled: 'Whenever they burn books, they also burn people' in October 1988, but it is more than likely that he would have brought up the subject of 'The Burning of the Books' on 10 May, 1933 in Germany, when more than twenty thousand books by non-Nazis and Jewish authors were burned in front of a vast cheering crowd.<sup>14</sup> This led to an exodus of authors, actors, painters and musicians from that country, and the subsequent mayhem leading up to the Second World War. No war followed as a result of the burning of *The Satanic Verses* but possibly it is only because the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait in 1990, which led to the Gulf War, diverted the attention of Iran and the Western nations.

Rushdie responded to the book burning in an article in *The New York Review of Books* in which he said:

Nowadays...a powerful tribe of clerics have taken over Islam. These are the contemporary Thought Police. They have turned Muhammad into a perfect being, his life into a perfect life, his revelation into the unambiguous, clear event it originally was not. Powerful taboos have been erected. One may not discuss Muhammad as if he were human, with human virtues and weaknesses. One may not discuss the growth of Islam as a historical phenomenon, as an ideology born out of its time. These are the taboos against which *The Satanic Verses* has transgressed (these and one other: I also tried to write about the place of women in Islamic society, and in the Koran). It is for this breach of taboo that the novel is, for me, the saddest irony of all; that after working for five years to give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture of which I am myself a member, I should see my book burned, largely unread, by the people it's about, people who might find some pleasure and much recognition in its pages. I tried to write against stereotypes; the zeal being anathematised, fulminated against, and set alight...

*The Satanic Verses* is not, in my view, an antireligious novel. It is, however, an attempt to write about migration, its stresses and transformations, from the point of view of migrants from the Indian subcontinent to Britain. This isot protests serve to confirm, in the Western mind, all the worst stereotypes of the Muslim world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Manguel, p283/284.

<sup>15</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'The Book Burning', *The New York Review Of Books*, 2 March 1989. p26.

Later, in 1990, in his essay 'In Good Faith', he said that 'the controversy over *The Satanic Verses* needs to be looked at as a political event, not purely as a theological one' and he cites as examples: India, where 'the Muslim fundamentalist MP Syed Shahabuddin used my novel as a stick with which to threaten the wobbling Rajiv Gandhi government'; in South Africa, 'the row over the book served the purpose of the regime by driving a wedge between the Muslim and non-muslim members of the UDF'; in Pakistan 'it was a way for the fundamentalists to try and regain the political initiative after their trouncing in the general election'; in Iran, 'the incident could only be properly understood when seen in the context of the country's internal struggles', and in Britain, he said 'the "affair" swung the balance of power back towards the mosques' after a decade of conflict between community secular and religious leaders.<sup>16</sup>

Rushdie has always maintained that *The Satanic Verses* is a work of fiction and thus any offence taken is the result of subjective reading by a particular reader. This is a valid point, as is Rushdie's opinion that 'the responsibility for violence lies with those who perpetrate it',<sup>17</sup> but the book reads as a severe indictment of the state of race relations in London which are far from fictional.<sup>18</sup> The Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian revolution, however, was determined not to see anything of value in the book regardless of whether or not it was fact or fiction, and on 14 February 1989, he issued a denunciation of Rushdie in the form of a fatwa, an Islamic religious edict:

I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses* --which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur'an [Koran] --and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death.

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<sup>16</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, London: Granta Books, 1991. p410.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p411.

<sup>18</sup> The fact/fiction debate can be applied to nearly all novels so to suggest that *The Satanic Verses* should not be published as fiction because of its facts is not an option.

I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr.<sup>19</sup>

and since that date, until very recently,<sup>20</sup> Rushdie has been in hiding, guarded night and day by the selfsame Special Branch British policemen whom he has caricatured in his novel. Although many Muslims criticised the fatwa and denied Khomeini's prerogative to pronounce it (as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran is obligated under the treaty to uphold individual rights to free speech), it has had a lasting effect on Rushdie's life, and on all those in the publishing and bookselling trade worldwide who had any dealings with *The Satanic Verses*.

While Rushdie was considering whether or not *The Satanic Verses* was a political or theological event he appears to have overlooked the effect his novel was having on the world of publishing and bookselling. Book shop staff worldwide were having to contend with threats and bombings if they stocked the book and, in some instances, they were castigated for their timidity if they chose not to stock it. In Bradford, branches of W H Smith had no choice. The police told them to remove their displays of *The Satanic Verses* because 'they could not guarantee for the indefinite future the safety of [the] staff and customers and the continued maintenance of public order.'<sup>21</sup> The Booksellers Association issued a security checklist to all its members detailing the procedures to be followed for handling suspicious packages and bomb threats. They emphasised the importance of staff safety and training but it was a situation outside normal bookselling experience and the stress imposed on publishing and bookselling staff in Britain and the rest of the world, was incalculable. The cost of repairing buildings and replacing stock after bomb and fire damage, as well as the loss of trade, added to the overall expenditure this novel engendered. Ruined stock alone cost Haigh & Hochland in Manchester £94,000 but multiply that figure with similar sums for

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<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, p113.

<sup>20</sup> In theory Rushdie was free to come and go as he liked by the end of 1998 when diplomatic relations were resumed between Britain and Iran.

<sup>21</sup> *The Bookseller*, 20 January 1989, p165.

book shops and book warehouses in Europe and America and the true cost of the damage caused by *The Satanic Verses* runs into millions. For Viking Penguin their security expenses were expected to reach £1.7 million<sup>22</sup> which suggests a future form of censorship. A publishing company is likely to look very closely at the possible financial costs involved of any novel that is in any way deemed to be controversial.

Five months after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* another book, *Murder in the Name of Allah* by Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad became a casualty of the Rushdie fallout. It had to be removed from stock in a number of book shops because its subject matter was comparable to Rushdie's, even though Ahmad, as leader of the ten million strong Ahmadi Movement in Islam, argued for religious tolerance.<sup>23</sup>

The 1989 London International Book Fair was dominated by security because of Penguin's insistence on being present although they had to accede to the fair organiser's request not to display *The Satanic Verses*. More controversy was caused over the Tehran Book Fair because Penguin were banned by the Iranians from attending it. Splits in the solidarity of the publishing trade became apparent at the annual general meeting of the Publishers Association on 27 April 1989 when Louis Baum, a director of J Whitaker, proposed an amendment to the resolution 'that the a.g.m. express its support for Salman Rushdie and Penguin by urging PA members to boycott the Tehran Book Fair, from which Penguin Books Ltd has been banned.'<sup>24</sup> It was rejected. It would appear that much of the support and encouragement Penguin had had from fellow publishers during the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had evaporated, perhaps not surprising since the two situations were not the same. With *Lady Chatterley's Lover* it had been friendly rivalry and the element of risk was peculiar to Penguin alone, whereas with *The Satanic Verses*, any publishing company

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<sup>22</sup> *The Bookseller*, 21 April 1989, p1377.

<sup>23</sup> *The Bookseller*, 2 June 1989, p1851.

<sup>24</sup> *The Bookseller*, 5 May 1989, p1540.

prepared to side with Viking Penguin was risking potentially the safety of their staff, their property, and any commercial activities.

The PA had published a statement on racism and sexism in books in 1987.<sup>25</sup> It had been drafted because of the concern they felt over the refusal of some libraries and schools to stock or use books alleged to contain racist or sexist ideas but it was also relevant to the Rushdie affair because it showed that the PA was aware that insidious censorship was being practised. Richard Hoggart referred to the statement in his paper entitled 'Freedom to Publish: Unpopular Opinion' given to the 23rd International Publishers Association Congress in London in June 1988.<sup>26</sup> His paper was about censorship, particularly governmental intervention in the work of the mass media and it was as if he foresaw the events following the fatwa when he said: 'Most politicians are in favour of freedom - until it becomes awkward and difficult.'<sup>27</sup> The PA statement reiterated the important principle that 'writers and publishers must be free to write and to publish what they choose' and they qualified their position with the sentence:

Although the PA is not, and cannot be, responsible for the books published by publishers, it is nevertheless concerned that all those engaged in the supply of books are aware of the sensitivities that may be involved, so that books do not cause inadvertent harm, but it reaffirms that there should be free access to ideas and information of all kinds, including to ideas and information which may be unpopular, contrary to received wisdom or current thinking, or which may cause offence.

Whilst applauding the PA for making 'some brave efforts to tackle this problem' Hoggart says that, 'the prose of its statements is often understandably nervous, as of someone walking

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<sup>25</sup> *Racism and Sexism in Books*, published by The Publishers Association. The ex-DG of the PA, Clive Bradley, told me that this statement was published in 1987 but the copy sent to me by the PA says that it was first published in 1989 and reissued in 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Hoggart, 'Freedom to Publish: Unpopular Opinion', *Books in the 1990s: The Proceedings of the 23rd International Publishers Association Congress*, London, 12-17 June 1988. Published by the Bowker/Saur division of Butterworth's on behalf of the British Publishers Association, 1988. p75.

<sup>27</sup> Hoggart, p74.

over hot coals in stockinged feet', and he sees it as all a bit vague.<sup>28</sup> In 1989, following the fatwa the PA continued to voice their above quoted view but, like the BA, it could not dictate policy to its members. Therefore any hostile criticism of the way the PA reacted to the Rushdie affair could be considered arbitrary.

There was one publisher who reacted rather differently to the Ayatollah Khomeini 's fatwa and introduced a touch of levity in the otherwise grim circumstances, soon after it was issued. To show his support for the beleaguered book trade, Robert Maxwell proposed something more discriminating than a death threat:

I will offer \$10m to the man or woman who will, not kill, but civilise the barbarian Ayatollah, the test of which shall be that Khomeini shall publicly recite the Ten Commandments, with special reference to the sixth ('Thou shalt not kill') and the ninth ('Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour'), and pass a short test on Pericles' Funeral Oration and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.<sup>29</sup>

Needless to say there is no evidence that anyone took him seriously even though he was addressing the headquarters staff of the UK Land Forces of the British Army in Wilton, Salisbury at the time. One can appreciate why he was making his suggestion to such an audience. Nevertheless it was indicative of the widespread publicity the fatwa received beyond the publishing and book trade, that Maxwell felt confident enough to use that audience as a platform to launch his offer, and, by doing so, he inadvertently, or advertently, helped a certain section of 'the beleaguered book trade' to gain some more sales. It is often with the assistance of such serendipitous occasions bestsellers are made.

On the same day as the April PA meeting in London the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune* were scathing in their views of publishers 'who were willing to sacrifice free expression on the altar of business as usual'. Naming Oxford University Press, Butterworth, McGraw-Hill and John Wiley in particular, they went on to say: 'If publishers

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<sup>28</sup> Hoggart, p78.

<sup>29</sup> *The Bookseller*, 24 February 1989, p604.

can't or won't stick together on a matter so fundamental, then all authors - and freedom of expression - are in trouble.<sup>30</sup> Following these articles McGraw-Hill and Wiley withdrew from the Tehran Book Fair but Butterworth and OUP did not. To suggest, as *The New York Times* did, that it was only 'a minimal sacrifice' for a publisher to boycott a book fair is unwarranted. For many small specialist publishers business generated at these book fairs is their only business thus the boycott of Tehran Book Fair had to be, in some cases, a financial decision not a moral one.

The fair disputes continued with Iran being barred from the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 1989 - the first time in its forty-one year history that a national exhibitor has been barred. With nearly a year of threats and bombings on which to reflect, the fair management spent DM 250,000 on extra security which increased the fair's running deficit. Pre-fair planning also considered a proposal for setting up a Red Cross field hospital with 300 beds for shrapnel victims.<sup>31</sup> By this time Penguin's estimated costs for security had risen to more than £2 million<sup>32</sup> with comparable costs to the nation to keep the cause of the furore safe.

The cause of the furore, Salman Rushdie, the son of liberal and prosperous Muslim parents, was born in Bombay in 1947, a significant year in the context of his first major novel, *Midnight's Children*, written in 1981, because it was on August 14 of that year Pakistan, became independent of India as part of an agreement ending British colonialism in South Asia. The resulting chaos as six million Muslims moved north to the newly-established Islamic state and eight million Hindus and Sikhs moved south proved to be a very violent period. Rushdie's parents remained in Bombay so Rushdie was not exposed to the strongly pro-Islamic viewpoint of many Pakistanis. In 1961, at the age of thirteen, he was sent to England to Rugby School, and the following year his parents followed him and became

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *The Bookseller*, 5 May 1989, p1540.

<sup>31</sup> *Publishers Weekly*, 3 November 1989.

<sup>32</sup> *The Bookseller*, 22/29 December 1989, p1996.



naturalised British citizens, living in Kensington, later used as a locale in *The Satanic Verses*. Two years later, his father moved the family to Karachi in Pakistan, a move Rushdie deplored as he felt his homeland had been taken away from him.

Speaking in an interview in 1997, Rushdie talked about this period of his life and said that although he had grown up in India speaking English and knowing about England, when he went to Rugby he realised for the first time that he was a foreigner and was shocked at being referred to as a 'wog'. Later, referring to the character Jabreel in *The Satanic Verses* who eats a pig, the interviewer asked if it was autobiographical or not. Rushdie replied:

At Rugby School, in a Latin lesson being bored, looking out of the window at the Chapel, technically called a house of God but it was unoccupied and by end of the Latin lesson had ceased to believe in God - [interruption here for the interviewer to establish that the Latin lesson lasted 40 minutes] - To celebrate, to prove new status, I went to the school shop and bought a ham sandwich, a horribly curling up at the edges thing, and humbly ate this as proof of the non-existence of God. Since I was not struck dead by lightning this seemed to prove it and I've continued to think that ever since.<sup>33</sup>

The interviewer then established that the character Jabreel in *The Satanic Verses* also lost his faith.

In 1965 Rushdie went on to read history at Kings College, Cambridge, where he wrote a thesis on the early rise of Islam, *Muhammad, Islam and the Rise of the Caliphs*, and it was in his last year that he started to investigate the origins of Islam and first encountered the story of the 'satanic verses'; the verses the Prophet rejected because they had been dictated to him not by the Archangel Gabriel but by the devil. When he graduated in 1968 his father wanted him to run a new towel factory he had set up in Karachi but Rushdie wanted to pursue his interests in the theatre and films, which made the relationship with his father very strained.

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<sup>33</sup> Ruby, BBC2, 19 May 1997.

Following a period of living on the dole and occasionally acting, he got a job in advertising with the firm of Sharp MacManus. In 1971 he finished a novel entitled *The Book of the Pir* (a term that appears in *The Satanic Verses*) but it was rejected and never published so he went back to advertising, preparing commercials for Ogilvy and Mather.<sup>34</sup> In 1976 he married Clarissa Luard, thought to be the model for the character Pamela Lovelace in *The Satanic Verses*, after living with her for two years, and with whom he has a son. This marriage ended when he fell in love with the writer Robyn Davidson while on a tour of Australia in 1983, but after a stormy relationship with her he met and married the American novelist Marianne Wiggins in 1988. She went into hiding with him following the declaration of the fatwa but five months later she left him.<sup>35</sup>

In 1975 Rushdie managed to get his second novel *Grimas* published by Gollancz as science fiction 'to the worst reviews I have ever seen for a first novel' said his publisher Liz Calder. Only 800 hardback copies were sold before being pulped, although later successes have ensured retrospective paperback reprints. In 1981 Calder published the 446 page novel *Midnight's Children* at Cape<sup>36</sup> and with it Rushdie won the Booker Prize for that year much to the surprise of the publishing industry because, Calder explains, 'that big books didn't sell, that books on India didn't sell, and that big books on India sold worst of all'.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately for him, since the media suggest he is a poor loser, he failed to win the Booker in 1983 with

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<sup>34</sup> He is credited with the 'Naughty. But nice' cream cakes campaign for The Milk Marketing Board, and for putting 'bubble' into the Aero chocolate bar advertisement, as in 'delectabubble' and 'incredibubble'.

<sup>35</sup> Her publisher, Harper & Row, had planned a seven city marketing campaign tour timed to the 22 February 1989 publication date of her new novel *John Dollar* and the American publication of *The Satanic Verses*. *Publishers Weekly*, 3 March 1989. p26.

<sup>36</sup> Hardback sales of this novel were low by Booker standards. By January 1982 Cape had sold over 21,000 copies but they were mostly paperback. Following the publicity surrounding *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie's sales increased of all his books, especially in the US. Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, London: Bloomsbury, 1996. p103,104,106.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted by Suzie Mackenzie in *The Guardian Weekend*, 4 November 1995. p15.

his next novel *Shame*, which might explain why, in 1986, when Calder left Cape to co-found the new publishing house Bloomsbury Rushdie decided to change his agent and publisher. It had been generally believed that Calder would take Rushdie, her most valuable author, and his proposed new novel with her to Bloomsbury since she had been a friend and staunch supporter from the very beginning of his literary career. However, with hindsight, his defection was probably a relief to her. Malise Ruthven, in his book *A Satanic Affair*, says that this move of Rushdie's should not reflect badly on him because the £50,000 offered to him by Bloomsbury for the UK hardback rights of *The Satanic Verses* 'was hardly commensurate with his standing as one of the half dozen most gifted young writers in the English language'.<sup>38</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncement of the death sentence on Salman Rushdie on the grounds that his novel *The Satanic Verses* was blasphemous, caused a rapid rise in Islamic consciousness around the world. William Montgomery Watt, writing in *Muslim- Christian Encounter: Perceptions and Misconceptions*,<sup>39</sup> saw Rushdie's novel 'as no more than the spark which set alight an explosive mixture already present' which some European commentators, according to Michael Hanne, dramatically compared to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914.<sup>40</sup> The world was spared a war between Iran and the Western nations because Iraq's Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, thus diverting the potential conflict away from Iran. The latent antagonism between Iran and the West brought to the fore by the 'spark' which was *The Satanic Verses*, had begun to materialise as early as 1979 when the Shah of Iran was forced into exile and replaced by Ayatollah Khomeini as head of the Islamic fundamentalist government, and 100 US

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<sup>38</sup> Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1990. p22.

<sup>39</sup> W Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounter: Perception and Misconceptions*, London: Routledge, 1991. p121.

<sup>40</sup> Hanne, p192.

Embassy staff and Marines were taken hostage. President Carter broke off diplomatic relations with Iran in 1980 and announced a trade ban. Conflict with Iraq and disagreements among their Asian neighbours all helped to compound the frustrations the Iranian Muslims felt they endured because the West looked down on them and did not treat them as equals. In Iran, the USA was referred to as 'the great Satan' and Britain as its partner in its anti-Islamic views, which made it look as if it was an attack on Britain in general rather than on Rushdie for his blasphemous writings. Which, of course, it was.

By 1988 the Ayatollah appeared to be losing his power following Iran's political and military defeat in the war with Iraq and he was encouraged by advisers to make Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses* the scapegoat for all his problems. The Ayatollah seriously misjudged the ways of the West and the value of publicity when he announced the fatwa because his declaration was drawn to the attention of an international audience thus leading to an increase in sales of the novel and the wrath of much of the Western world. (Three days after the fatwa *The Bookseller* announced that *The Satanic Verses* was the best-selling hardback fiction for the fourth week, with estimated sales of 2,000 a week.) His declaration also posed a significant question for the immigrant Muslim population in Britain over which law do they obey. The law of their new homeland, or that of their religious leaders? This potential conflict of loyalties must have made life very difficult for the majority of the Muslims in Britain who are generally regarded as peaceful and very family orientated.

These questions about which law has priority have been repeatedly raised in the media and the answers have varied as the years of the fatwa have increased. Since the 1960s the mass migration of people from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to the Western countries has meant a great upheaval in the lives of both the immigrants and those peoples of the 'host' countries. Most of the immigrants were familiar with the Western way of life as their lands had been subjected to colonial and imperialist rule, but the influx of so many peoples with their diverse cultures and faiths led to a lot of tension and racism. In the secular West, religion is a

private individual matter and, on the whole, it does not clash with the laws of the land. To a conservative Muslim, Islam is not just a religion, it is a way of life, an all-embracing cultural framework that provides a stability amid the chaos and uncertainty of their lives in the West, where they are often economically disadvantaged and racially attacked. The majority of Muslim Asian immigrants who had come to Britain from Pakistan and Bangladesh were fleeing from poverty and hunger and large groups of them had settled in Yorkshire and Lancashire where they originally found jobs in the textile trade. The family income, which tended to be low because Islam is associated with low levels of employment among women and large family sizes, suffered when this trade collapsed. Thus, the 'Rushdie affair' gave some of these alienated immigrants an issue on which to focus their frustrations, orchestrated by their religious leaders.

The Iranian government has frequently stressed that Muslims must obey the law of the state in which they live, but the religious leaders, who may also be government leaders, insist that the fatwa remains in force and cannot be rescinded. However, in 1998, as the East and West near a rapprochement to ease the trade embargo, this dichotomy has become somewhat blurred as the new more liberal Iranian government tries to distance itself from Ayatollah Khomeini's period of power, (he died in 1989), and from the Islamic organisation, the 15 Khordad Foundation, which is offering a two and a half million dollar bounty to the killer of Salman Rushdie.

This dichotomy also applies to whether or not the Islamic punishment for apostasy and blasphemy is death. Khomeini based his fatwa against Rushdie on verse 5:34 of the Koran: 'Those that make war against God and His apostle and spread disorder in the land shall be slain ...'. But this reference to persons committing acts against the state clearly does not apply to blasphemers or apostates. There are references to apostasy in the Koran, namely verses 2:218; 4:138; 47:26; etc., but they do not invoke capital or corporal punishment in this world, only in the next at the will of Allah. Verse 2:256 states: 'There shall be no compulsion

in religion' speaks for itself and no secondary source can dispute it. Similarly for blasphemy, there is no penalty in this world advocated in Islamic law. Instead the Koran relies on goodwill to uphold the honour of God. In verse 6:108 it says:

Do not revile the idols which they invoke besides God, lest in their ignorance they revile God with rancour. Thus have We made the actions of each community seem pleasing to itself. To their Lord shall they return, and He will declare to them what they have done.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, while Western government spokespersons, civil liberties groups, religious leaders, immigrants and the vociferous 'man in the street' were queuing up to voice their opinions on the rights, or non-rights, to free speech, *The Satanic Verses* became a bestseller and Salman Rushdie a fugitive. In his first six years of isolation he estimated that he changed his residence thirty times and at one point he slept in thirteen beds in twenty days. British intelligence had moved him at a moment's notice to remote locations in Scotland and Wales and his life became that of a hostage, yet guarded throughout by policemen. The financial cost to the state amounts to millions of pounds, (the media say £5 million up to 1995 and Rushdie is reputed to have contributed £100,000; he also contributed some prize money to the Defence Committee set up in his name), but if one believes he is at the centre of an important debate about freedom of expression, a value by which the West has always defined itself, and about censorship then no price is too high. There are those who think that Rushdie was foolhardy, that he should have withdrawn the book as requested by the Ayatollah, that he should apologise, that by persisting on his rights to free speech he has endangered the lives of many and, admittedly indirectly, has caused the death of Professor Hitoshi Igarashi in Tokyo on 11 July 1991, because he translated *The Satanic Verses*.

The discussion about the rights of Rushdie to write his book and Penguin to publish it caught several people in a contradictory position. Some of the more vocal British MPs have large

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<sup>41</sup> *The Koran*, Translated by N J Dawood, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997. Fifth revised edition, first published 1990.

Muslim contingents in their constituencies, such as Keith Vaz, Labour MP for Leicester East and a Roman Catholic of Indian origin, who, in a phonecall to Rushdie 'vehemently expressed his full support for me and my work, and his horror at the threat against my life'. However, as Rushdie notes in his essay *In Good Faith*: 'A few weeks later, this same gentleman was to be found addressing a demonstration full of men demanding my death...By now Mr Vaz wanted my work banned, and threats against my life seemed not to trouble him any longer'.<sup>42</sup> Max Madden, a Bradford MP, had a small majority to protect. Government ministers had trade partners to placate, for example the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who, with the Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe conceded that *The Satanic Verses* was 'offensive' while others, perhaps, just had an antipathy to Rushdie himself. Germaine Greer and Norman Tebbit apparently do not like him, and Lord Dacre thought that it might be a good idea if Rushdie was beaten up in a dark alley.<sup>43</sup> Roald Dahl referred to him as 'a dangerous opportunist' and suggested that the 'sensationalism' was a deliberate ploy to get the book to the top of the bestseller list. He regretted Rushdie's 'hero' status among his fellow authors and within the Society of Authors<sup>44</sup> and his ex-wife Marianne Wiggins is alleged to have said: 'All of us wish that the man had been as great as the event. That's the secret everyone is trying to keep hidden. He is not.'<sup>45</sup> For all those who had reason to dislike or condemn Rushdie, there were many more who supported him, including a list of more than eighty prominent Asian artists, writers and academics in Britain, many of whom were Muslim, and signed a statement defending the right of Salman Rushdie to publish his novel.<sup>46</sup> A publisher tried to help defuse the situation by changing one word in the title of a book. In 1991 the Hogarth Press paperback edition of Malise Ruthven's hardback *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and The Rage of Islam* became *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie*

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<sup>42</sup> Rushdie, 'In Good Faith'. p406.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p406.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in *Publishers Weekly*, 17 March 1989, p13.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Anne McElvoy, *The Times Magazine*, 26 August 1995. p14.

<sup>46</sup> Bedford, p10.

*and the Wrath of Islam*. By taking the anger out of the word 'rage' and linking it to the divine anger in the word 'wrath' perhaps the publisher thought that those aggrieved would be placated. Yet, whatever one's feelings for or against Rushdie and his rights one has to understand the British parliamentary ministers' reluctance to come out and condemn Iran because of the delicate negotiations that were going on to free the British hostages held by Iranians in the Lebanon from conditions of far greater suffering than any Rushdie had to endure.

Nevertheless, throughout the years of the fatwa Frances D'Souza as Chairperson, and Carmel Bedford as Secretary of the International Rushdie Defence Committee, and all its members and associates throughout the world have shown constant dedication to the right of free speech for Rushdie and others. They have worked tirelessly on his behalf initially, and latterly for other persecuted writers such as Taslima Nasrim, and it would seem disingenuous for Rushdie to say in a statement on 12 July 1991, following the death of Professor Igarashi, that: 'The crisis created by the Iranian fatwa of February 1989 has faded from the news of late; indeed it has been more or less impossible to interest the British news media in the continued threat.'<sup>47</sup>

In Carmel Bedford's book, where she details all the events surrounding the first 2,000 days of the fatwa, she reports all the 'behind the scenes' activity that may not have reached the press as well as the more prominently publicised events. It appears from her report that Rushdie was involved at every opportunity even, at times, to the detriment of the safety of those concerned with him. Despite his 'hostage-like' situation he was able to travel, particularly in Europe, and made surprise appearances on television and at functions relatively frequently, although, admittedly, these sightings of Rushdie did appear to occur more often abroad. Between June 1992 and December 1993 he visited no less than sixteen

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<sup>47</sup> Bedford, p66.



countries meeting fellow writers and political opposition leaders and, later, Heads of State. In 1995, which would have been at the beginning of the 3,000 days of the fatwa, the *Times* newspaper alone had more than twenty-six articles or items specifically referring to him. This, of course, was helped in part by the publication of his new book that year, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and the staging of *The Times/Dillons* debate *Writers Against the State* at which Rushdie appeared in September. There are similar numbers of mentions in the broadsheet newspapers for 1996, 1997 and 1998 with one of the final reports on 20 October 1998 announcing the disbandment of the International Rushdie Defence Committee after consulting Rushdie, following successful trade agreements between Iran and Britain on the understanding that the Iranian government would not press for the fatwa to be enforced. However, no such agreement has been reached with the 15 Khordad Foundation, who insist on maintaining their threat, and increasing the bounty money to include expenses. This Foundation, whose income comes from supermarkets and other businesses in Iran, was originally set up to care for relatives of demonstrators killed in an anti-American protest in 1963.

Carmel Bedford's book was published by ARTICLE 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, which takes its name from article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is an organisation that 'works impartially and systematically to identify and oppose censorship world-wide' but it is not a wealthy group so it has to depend on interested parties for financial donations. In the case of the Rushdie campaign it was difficult to get funds because there was not a great deal of sympathy for Rushdie, says Carmel Bedford. However the Scandinavians were helpful, particularly Norway, and as a result the archives are to be given to the Norwegians when the campaign is finally wound up. Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland and the US also had National Committees supporting Rushdie.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Personal telephone conversation, 1998.

ARTICLE 19 has also been instrumental in bringing the world's attention to additional banned writers whilst campaigning for Rushdie. Fatwas have been issued against other writers, such as Taslima Nasrim, who favoured legal changes to give more rights to women, and although this has now become common knowledge, she does not command the same high profile as Rushdie, and is still in danger. She was included in the group of writers invited to speak at a series of Amnesty lectures in Oxford in 1995, on the theme of *The Writer as Dissident*, together with Andre Brink, Edmund White and Wole Soyinka. But comparing her to Salman Rushdie has had a detrimental effect on her case. She was charged with the relatively minor offence of 'insulting religious feelings'<sup>49</sup> under Section 295A of the Bangladesh Penal Code, which carries a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment. By linking her to Salman Rushdie she may not get a fair trial or be offered adequate physical protection if she appeared in court - unlike Rushdie, who had constant police protection.

The conflict over Salman Rushdie and his novel *The Satanic Verses* has been mainly discussed in terms of such issues as free speech and free expression, and whether or not the novel is fiction. Perhaps, if Rushdie had put a disclaimer along the lines of 'All the events and characters in this book are entirely fictitious, and are not intended to represent any actual event or real person either living or dead...' as is often found at the beginning of a fiction novel, this may have forestalled another area of conflict: the question of reading. Muslim readers of *The Satanic Verses* interpret certain paragraphs as blasphemous whereas Rushdie maintains that this is an inappropriate way of reading his novel since it is a work of art and therefore should not be read in a literal manner. In his essay *In Good Faith* he says:

Fiction uses facts as a starting place and then spirals away to explore its real concerns, which are only tangentially historical. Not to see this, to treat fiction as if it were fact, is to make a serious mistake of categories. The case of *The Satanic Verses* may be one of the biggest category mistakes in literary history.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Rushdie Alert*, Vol 2, August 1994. The International Rushdie Defence Committee.

<sup>50</sup> Rushdie, 'In Good Faith'. p409.

Although Rushdie does not see his novel as blasphemous, the Muslim readers claim that they can draw on any number of examples such as the Koran being revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel to prove that it is. In Urdu an angel is called a 'farishta' and in the novel one of the central characters is 'Gibreel Farishta', who is referred to as a sex-starved half-god half-human, on the loose, who indulges in all sorts of vices including adultery, incest, and eating pork just to prove that God is no longer omnipotent (p25-30).<sup>51</sup> Mecca, the holiest city of Islam, is denigrated and renamed Jahilia, which means city of ignorance (p95). The prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) is called a 'bastard' (p95). Two of Muhammad's companions, Salman Farsi and Bilal are referred to as 'some sort of bum' and 'an enormous black monster' respectively, and with a third, Khalid, they are regarded as 'riff-raff, trinity of scum' and 'those goons those fucking clowns' (p101) and the reputation of Muhammad's uncle Hamza is impugned (p104).

According to these Muslim readers not only individuals are demeaned, anything Islamic is treated with disdain however trivial. For example, Rushdie makes fun of the rules that he believes govern a Muslim's life thus denying him the chance to think for himself:

Amid the palm-trees of the oasis Gibreel appeared to the Prophet and found himself spouting rules, rules, rules, until the faithful could scarcely bear the prospect of any more revelation, Salman said, rules about every damn thing, if a man farts let him turn his face to the wind, a rule about which hand to use for the purpose of cleaning one's behind. It was as if no aspect of human existence was to be left unregulated, free. The revelation...told the faithful how much to eat, how deeply they should sleep, and which sexual positions had received divine sanction, so that they learned sodomy and the missionary position were approved of by the archangel, whereas the forbidden postures included all those in which the female was on top. Gibreel further listed the permitted and forbidden subjects of conversation, and earmarked the parts of the body which could not be scratched no matter how unbearably they itched..... (p363-4)

Rushdie also ridicules the Islamic form of ablution before prayer:

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<sup>51</sup> All page reference numbers refer to the American paperback edition of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Delaware: The Consortium Inc., 1992.

Ablutions, always ablutions, the legs up to the knees, the arms down to the elbows, the head down to the neck. Dry-torsoed, wet-limbed and damp-headed, what eccentrics they look! Splish, splosh, washing and praying. (p104)

But, according to Arshad Ahmed in his book *Rushdie: Haunted by his Unholy Ghosts*, Rushdie has saved his worst blasphemy against Islam when he uses the name 'Mahound' to describe Muhammad. 'This was in accordance with the medieval propaganda through the Crusades which had built up a conception of Muhammad as 'the great enemy' of Christendom who was transformed into Mahound, the prince of darkness'.<sup>52</sup>

But Rushdie has, to a certain extent, provided himself with protection from the charges of blasphemy levelled at him by putting the offending passages in the book as dream sequences, which is a convention from medieval times. The four chapters considered the most offensive, and incidentally where Rushdie 'write[s] about the place of women in Islamic society, and in the Koran',<sup>53</sup> 'Mahound', 'Ayesha', 'Return to Jahilia', and 'The Parting of the Arabian Sea', are all explicitly presented as the dreams of Gibreel. The Jahilia chapter, the one that features the brothel scenario where whores take on the personas of the Prophet's wives, is the section most often taken out of context, but Rushdie leaves the reader in no doubt that his character is dreaming when he states in the text: 'Gibreel dreamed a curtain': ('The Curtain, *Hijab*, was the name of the most popular brothel in Jahilia').(p376) Later this dream scene continues with the seemingly blasphemous words which were the most contributory to Rushdie's death sentence: 'When news got around Jahilia that the whores of the Curtain had each assumed the identity of one of Mahound's wives...'. (p381) Nine pages on a new section begins: 'Gibreel dreamed the death of Baal', and on page 393 'Gibreel dreamed the death of Mahound', and finally: 'It was the end of the dream' (p394). The dreamer of these dreams, and the reader is always told that they are dreams, is neither

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<sup>52</sup> Arshad Ahmed, *Rushdie: Haunted By His Unholy Ghosts*, London: Avon Books, 1997. p94.

<sup>53</sup> Rushdie, 'The Book Burning', p26.

the narrator nor the implied author of the book as a whole, he is a diagnosed schizophrenic, a murderer and he finally commits suicide.

There is no doubt that by 1988 Salman Rushdie was considered a serious writer but can he, or any other reputable writer, assume that each successive work of his will be instantly accepted as a major work. He says in his essay, 'In Good Faith', that *The Satanic Verses* 'aspires to the condition of literature' and that 'people on all sides of the argument have lost sight of the fact',<sup>54</sup> and because it is literature it should not be read in a literal manner but rhetorically or figuratively. He might be aspiring to literature but he cannot dictate to the readers the manner in which they read it; he can offer it to the reading public as a literary text but it is up to the readers whether or not they accept it as such. If the 'literary merit' of this book was immediately accepted by non-Muslim readers it could be argued by Muslims that their judgement was not being made in good faith but merely as an act of special pleading to safeguard the Western values of free speech and free expression from attack. The Defence Counsel did much the same in the Lady Chatterley case in 1960. (But 'literary merit is no defence to a blasphemous libel charge'.<sup>55</sup>) A further point Muslim readers may raise is that non-Muslims do not care if Rushdie's representation of the Prophet is insulting to Islam or not - if they did care, would they be so ready to bestow the special status of literature on the text? For many of the Muslim readers the insulting nature of the text eclipsed any view about the novel's literary position and as a result are prepared to accept the Ayatollah's fatwa. In the continuing debate over *The Satanic Verses* each side has tried to put pressure on the other to modify its opinions but these prejudices are so firmly entrenched, reconciliation is unlikely.

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<sup>54</sup> Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', p393.

<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey Robertson QC, *The Times*, 25 July 1989.

Although Muslims generally are devoted to their own religion they also have a strong belief in all the prophets of God and respect other religions. This was particularly evident when Martin Scorsese's 1988 film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which provoked demonstrations outside cinemas around the world because of the way Christ was portrayed, was released and the Muslims appeared to be more vociferous in their complaints than any other religious groups. The fact that that film was allowed to be shown in a still notionally Christian country perhaps indicates the general public's attitude towards religion in general and it is therefore not surprising that the British public did not understand the Muslim reaction to *The Satanic Verses*.

Rushdie evidently lost his Islamic faith when he was a teenager at Rugby school and at the time he was writing *The Satanic Verses*, he apparently did not consider himself a Muslim. (There are media reports saying that he became a Muslim on Christmas Eve 1990 but this conversion was short lived, so the inference is, because the fatwa was not retracted. A British lawyer, Francis Bennion resigned from the Rushdie Defence Committee because he believed Rushdie had let down his supporters by adopting the creed that allows a novelist to be murdered for what he has written in a novel.) In his essay 'In God We Trust'<sup>56</sup> he writes about the informality of religion in his life as a child mixing with Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Muslims and Christians. He has written about other controversial political issues in many of his works because he says: 'the distance between individuals and affairs of State is now so small that it no longer seems possible to write novels that ignore the public sphere'.<sup>57</sup> In *Shame* he disputed South Asian politics which earned him denunciations and praise for his courage and he has not been hesitant in expressing his opposition to the religious extremism that he believes pervades Indian and Pakistani politics, so *The Satanic Verses* can be seen as just another novel by Rushdie promoting these same themes. Ayatollah Khomeini, with the

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<sup>56</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'In God We Trust', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, London: Granta Books, 1991. p377.

<sup>57</sup> Rushdie, 'In God We Trust', p376.

jurisdiction of his revolutionary government at stake, felt his position was being questioned by Rushdie daring to probe the authority of the Prophet and the essence of the Koran. The resulting fatwa served in many Western minds to prove the narrow-minded, extremist nature of the religious fanatics leading Islamic states, the self-same fanatics of which Rushdie had frequently complained.

Rushdie's supposed conversion to Islam on Christmas Eve 1990 followed a meeting with a group of influential Muslims and as part of a negotiated deal he 'agreed not to permit new translations of *The Satanic Verses* nor to publish an English language paperback edition while any risk of further offence remains',<sup>58</sup> but within days of the meeting, these Muslims decided that they were not going to act as mediators between Rushdie and the Iranian clerical leaders and several publicly asked Rushdie to withdraw the hardback edition of his novel.

In February 1990 Rushdie had urged Viking Penguin to release the planned paperback edition in spite of the international crisis and the fire bomb attacks on book shops selling the hardback version. The results of a survey of staff of a hundred book shops showed that more than half thought Viking Penguin should publish the paperback edition but pressure was put on Rushdie to withdraw the proposed paperback because it might jeopardise the release of the Beirut hostages. Rushdie regretted the non-publication of the paperback because he thought it could be seen as a surrender on his part. 'I accept I was wrong to have given way on this point', he later told an audience in a speech at Columbia University, New York, '*The Satanic Verses* must be freely available and easily affordable if only because, if it is not read, these years will have no meaning'.<sup>59</sup> In December 1991 *The Bookseller*, with the approval of the Booksellers Association, pressed for a consortium of publishers to undertake

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<sup>58</sup> *Rushdie Alert*, Vol 1, June 1994.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

publication so as to lift the burden of responsibility from Viking Penguin. No British group came forward but an anonymous group of US publishers, known as The Consortium, published the first English language paperback edition, which was launched by Salman Rushdie himself in Washington, in March 1992.<sup>60</sup> Paperback translations of *The Satanic Verses* had been published and sold in large numbers in Norway and Denmark in 1990, and in Holland, Germany and Sweden in 1991.<sup>61</sup>

Libby Purves writing in *The Times*<sup>62</sup> says that the lack of teaching of religious instruction in '1960s Hampstead' was the reason 'younger literati' were amazed at the reaction to *The Satanic Verses*. They had not been taught about blasphemy. Perhaps if they have no knowledge of blasphemy they are oblivious to it when it features in anti-Christian plays and films, or perhaps it is something they, on the whole, do not feel strongly about. Obscenity is considered much more serious than blasphemy. In 1971, the magazine *Oz*, edited by Richard Neville, was seen as a great threat to the establishment because of its anarchic views, and was prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act. However, many Muslim critics have asserted that the blasphemy of which they complain would never be tolerated if Christian beliefs were at issue. They are right. In Britain blasphemy is illegal, and there have been prosecutions. In England in 1922 a man was jailed for his coarse obscenities about the Gospels and, in particular, for his description of Jesus entering Jerusalem 'like a circus clown on the back of two donkeys' (Rex v. Gott).<sup>63</sup> More recently, in 1978, James Kirkup, the editor of *Gay News*, a homosexual magazine, was charged with blasphemy because he published a poem ('The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name') that reads as if were written

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<sup>60</sup> This not strictly true according to the *Publishers Weekly* (17 November 1989) because the American Quality Paperback Book Club, a division of the Book-of-the-Month Club, included a \$9.95 trade paperback of *The Satanic Verses* in its November 1989 *Quality Paperback Review*. The title was licensed by both QPBC and BOMC before its initial hardcover publication.

<sup>61</sup> *Rushdie Alert*, Vol 1, op.cit.

<sup>62</sup> *The Times*, 30 June 1995.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed, p119.



by a Roman centurion at the foot of the Cross. In the poem the centurion and Jesus are homosexuals and the communication between them is explicit and undoubtedly shocking to believers. The trial judge would not allow any professional testimony about the literary merit of the poem or the author, despite the fact that Professor Kirkup was a distinguished poet with several anthologies published, and he congratulated the jury on their guilty verdict. This did not happen with *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie was praised, given awards and made an icon in literary circles. However, there is a link between the two cases. The UK Committee Against Blasphemy Law, originally formed during the *Gay News* case, was revived in 1989.

The International Committee for the Defence of Salman Rushdie and his Publishers produced a booklet in May 1989 entitled *The Crime Of Blasphemy - Why It Should Be Abolished*, where they set out 'the case for the abolition of the law as it stands; the case against replacing the law with a new (statutory) offence which includes the other religions besides Christianity; (and) the history of the blasphemy law in the United Kingdom'. Unfortunately their report ends without any resolution and to date the Labour government has reneged on a statement made while they were in opposition that they would repeal the laws of blasphemy and allow a free Commons vote on the issue. The legitimate grievances of the Muslim communities may have been allayed in the Rushdie case if only the government of the day had heeded the original UK Committee Against Blasphemy Law.

In December 1988 *The Bookseller* reported that the Director of Public Prosecutions was considering demands for the prosecution of Viking Penguin for the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>64</sup> There was a further report in July 1989 concerning a letter the Home Office Minister John Patten sent to leading British Muslims. In this letter he said that 'the blasphemy law will not be extended' because an extension of the law would lead to 'a rush of litigation which would damage relations between faiths' and he firmly squashed any idea of a

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<sup>64</sup> *The Bookseller*, 23 and 30 December 1988, p2447.

court case. Patten went on to say that he had 'been guided by two principles: the freedom of speech, thought and expression; and the notion of the rule of law' and as a result he had 'no power to intervene with publishers or to have *The Satanic Verses* removed from bookshop shelves. Nor would [he] seek or want any such power.'<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Robertson QC did not agree with Patten. He wanted a review of the blasphemy law because 'a law that protects only one religion has no place' but, he pointed out, no matter what evidence Rushdie gave in defence of his novel it would be inadmissible because 'in 1979 the House of Lords decided by a 3-2 majority that an alleged blasphemer's intentions are irrelevant. Only the consequence matters.'<sup>66</sup>

Since the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, it has been difficult to discuss it as a literary enterprise because of the political and cultural crisis it has caused but Bruce King, writing in *World Literature Today* in 1989, managed to ignore the religious controversy and produced a dispassionate comprehensive precis of this convoluted text:

*The Satanic Verses* tells the intertwined story of two contrasting Indian actors: the Anglophile Saladin Chamcha, who marries an English woman, becomes an British citizen, and distances himself from his countrymen; and Gibreel Farishta, a larger-than-life Bombay movie star famous for playing the part of gods in those popular Indian films known as "theologicals". As they progress through this highly self-conscious, self-reflective, fantastic, part-dream, part-realist novel, the two actors assume many roles. Saladin, the well-behaved imitation Englishman, turns into a large, satanic, fire-spouting goat, is rejected by his English wife, who takes another lover, is imagined (by Gibreel) as a scribe to whom a former businessman now turned prophet, Mahound, dictates the Qu'ran, becomes an evil Iago who revenges himself for a past hurt by destroying the highly emotional Gibreel through making him murderously jealous; finally Saladin is reconciled with his Indian father and his own Indianess. Gibreel, who, like Saladin, is supposed to have recovered miraculously from an immense fall from an airplane explosion caused by a fanatically dedicated female terrorist, becomes, to Saladin's envy, a popular hero in England, falls deeply in love, and fails at an attempt to popularize a new subgenre of skeptical theological films. It is the psychotic, drug-filled Gibreel who becomes an Angel Gabriel, fantasizing tales which transform reality, especially details from the lives of Gibreel, Saladin, and their women, into parodies of well-known literary and religious texts.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *The Bookseller*, 7 July 1989, p11.

<sup>66</sup> *The Times*, 25 July 1989.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce King, 'Who Wrote *The Satanic Verses*?', *Commentaries, World Literature Today*, Summer, Vol 63 (3), 1989. p433.

King's summary appears to have been written with the benefit of hindsight and therefore has included indications of the possibilities of religious and racial disharmony. It is much more explicit about the story-line, which is to be expected since his summary is part of a critical essay but the blurb written for the dust jacket of the original Viking Penguin hard back it is not quite so obvious. This might be because it was probably written after proof copies were read and rejected as unsuitable for publication, although both texts leave the major cause of the controversy over the book to the last phrase:

Just before dawn one winter's morning a hijacked jumbo-jet blows apart high above the English Channel. Through the debris of limbs, drinks trolleys, memories, blankets and oxygen masks, two figures fall towards the sea without the benefit of parachutes: Gibreel Farishta, India's legendary movie star, and Saladin Chamcha, the man of a thousand voices, self-made self and Anglophile supreme. Clinging to each other, singing rival songs, they plunge downward, and are finally washed up, alive, on the snow-covered sands of an English beach. A miracle; but an ambiguous one, because it soon becomes apparent that curious changes are coming over them. Gibreel seems to have acquired a halo, while to Saladin's dismay, his legs grow hairier, his feet turn into hoofs, and there are bumps burgeoning at his temples.

Gibreel and Saladin have been chosen (by whom?) as protagonists in the eternal wrestling match between Good and Evil. But which is which? Can demons be angelic? Can angels be devils in disguise? As the two men tumble through the tale, through time as well as space, towards their final confrontation, we are witnesses to a cycle of extraordinary stories, tales of love and passion, of betrayal and faith: the story of Ayesha, the butterfly-shrouded visionary who leads an Indian village on an impossible pilgrimage; of Allie, the mountain-climber haunted by a ghost who urges her to attempt the ultimate feat - a solo ascent of Everest; of murders, metamorphoses and riots in a London 'visible but unseen'; and, centrally, the story of Mahound, the prophet of Jahilia, the city of sand - Mahound, the recipient of a revelation in which satanic verses mingle with divine.<sup>68</sup>

It is regrettable that the fatwa debate has overshadowed the critical response to *The Satanic Verses* because it is funny, witty, full of puns and allusions, thought provoking, serious, and, at times, tiresomely clever. The oriental mythology, the Hindi, Arabic and Urdu phrases, the fantasies and the different characters with the same name can tax the reader's powers of concentration but I think the basic premise of the novel, as I have stated earlier, is the plight of the immigrant from Asia. It also feels as if it is a very personal novel. Rushdie appears to have no qualms about recycling intimate matters into the novel, which one way or another

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<sup>68</sup> Blurb from the jacket cover of the Viking Penguin, 1988, original hardback edition of *The Satanic Verses*. The copy I saw is kept in the rare books department of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

rather discounts his fiction claim, and when the reader is not trying to find the exact paragraph that caused the fatwa, he can note the parallels between many of the aspects of Rushdie's life and that of his characters, since the media have enlightened us about so many of them. For example: the death of his father, his surprise reaction to being called 'wog' at Rugby, his wife, his acceptance or non-acceptance in a place where he thought he belonged, his knowledge of the advertising business and local politics, his loss of faith, etc. are all mirrored in the text. He also reprocesses actual events, such as the occurrence at Hawks Bay in Karachi in February 1983, where a young girl who had had religious visions led a group of followers into the sea. If the reader gets beyond page fifteen, thus qualifying for membership of the exclusive, and most likely apocryphal, London literati 'Page 15 Club', he gives the reader an early indication of the magic realism to come when he says (p21):

Sometimes when he looked around him, especially in the afternoon heat when the air turned glutinous, the visible world, its features and inhabitants and things, seemed to be sticking up through the atmosphere like a profusion of hot icebergs, and he had the idea that everything continued down below the surface of the soupy air: people, motor-cars, dogs, movie billboards, trees, nine-tenths of their reality concealed from his eyes. He would blink, and the illusion would fade, but the sense of it never left him. He grew up believing in God, angels, demons, afreets, djinns, as matter-of-factly as if they were bullock-carts or lamp-posts, and it struck him as a failure in his own sight that he had never seen a ghost. He would dream of discovering a magic optometrist from whom he would purchase a pair of green-tinged spectacles which would correct his regrettable myopia, and after that he would be able to see through the dense, blinding air to the fabulous world beneath.

It is this type of passage that intrigues readers and encourages them to continue. There are so many possibilities but it is the words 'satanic verses' which are perhaps the most frequently heard words with reference to this novel because they are used in the title and because of their Islamic connotations. By reading through the book it is possible to find a reference to verses that could give a very simplistic reason for the title involving the two main characters Saladin and Gibreel. Saladin is jealous of Gibreel because of his girl friend Allie Cone. Saladin, speaking in verse, makes anonymous phonecalls to Gibreel impugning Allie's virtue, 'satanic verses that made him mad'(p445), as a result of which Allie and Gibreel die and the book ends. One would have had to read the book to find these particular verses and

popular opinion has it that not many people have, and besides, it has already been established that it is not these verses that caused the offence.

When Rushdie was at Cambridge he acknowledges that this was when he first heard about the Islamic 'satanic verses' and the apocryphal material recorded by two early Islamic commentators Al Tabari and Ibn Sa'd, whose debate Rushdie relays in his narrative which could justify his satanic verses title. The Koran, Muslim people study is in Arabic and non-Islamic scholars learn it phonetically taking on trust the meaning of it from their Mullahs in much the same way as Roman Catholic children used to learn the Latin Mass responses. Thus the uncanonical material that Rushdie uses in his novel, that reveals a different interpretation of the Koran than the one taught by the Mullahs puts them in a difficult position with their followers. This is one of the main reasons why the novel has caused such an outcry from Islamic scholars. Rushdie appears to be casting doubt on the veracity of the divine nature of the Koran's dictation. And it is this interpretation that many Muslims feel Rushdie knew would cause the furore that it did and therefore he was responsible for the outcome.

The episode to which Al Tabari refers, and Rushdie uses, is the question of whether three female goddesses, Al-Lat, Al-'Uzza, and Manat, honoured in Mecca in pre-Islamic times should continue to be so honoured. When Muhammad began his mission in Mecca he saw that the Meccans were rejecting his doctrine of a single God and to make things easier for them to accept it he made a statement, preserved in the Koran, verses 53:19-20: 'Have you considered Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza, and on Manat, the third other?'<sup>69</sup> In the Koran, Muhammad

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<sup>69</sup> Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, the first Asian Diocese Bishop in England, has also used the same line in falsely attributing satanic thoughts to the Prophet Muhammad. Dr Nazir-Ali hints at the assumption that Muhammad made compromises in order that his message would be accepted by the local inhabitants:

In the end one may have to conclude that although Muhammad desired continuity with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, he desired continuity with traditional Arab religion and culture as well. (This may account for his original acceptance of the goddesses Lat, Manat, 'Uzza as intercessors with Allah. He said later that this

was instructed to dismiss such a proposal, but Rushdie follows Al Tabari's version, which gives these Goddesses 'intermediary, lesser status' between Allah and humankind (p107) so as to gain the support of the people of Mecca. Subsequently Muhammad rejects these verses as satanically inspired and replaces them with those found in the Koran. Later, in the same chapter Rushdie adapts another story from Al Tabari in which Rushdie's character Salman al Farisi loses his faith when acting as one of Mahound's scribes because the prophet does not correct him when he unintentionally, and then intentionally, changes some of the words Mahound dictates to him.

By introducing these apocryphal versions of Koranic stories into his novel Rushdie<sup>70</sup> is questioning whether the Koran really is Allah's words and can Muslims be sure that Satan successfully introduced his words into the Koran on only one occasion, or was the Koran written by a person with his own interests to promote and with a divine authority to do so: '(S)o how excessively convenient it was that he should have come up with such a very businesslike archangel, who handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal, God.'(p364) Rushdie later says of his prophet: 'Salman began to notice how useful and well timed the angel's revelations tended to be,...All those revelations of convenience'(p365). This questioning of the veracity of the Koran is really the most crucial of all the complaints about *The Satanic Verses* because Rushdie appears to be questioning the validity of the knowledge of the Islamic clerics, who for centuries have governed every aspect of Muslim lives with this knowledge.

If one had been in Stockholm in October 1986 to hear Rushdie talk on *Minority Literatures in a Multicultural Society* one may have been prepared for *The Satanic Verses*, which he was

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verse had been inspired by Satan, and changed it.)

Michael Nazir-Ali, *Islam, A Christian Perspective*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983. p24/25.

<sup>70</sup> This again raises the argument about the use of facts in fiction.

in the process of writing. It validates the point that Rushdie's basic premise for the novel was to bring attention to the plight of the Asian immigrants. He talks about the experiences of black writers in a predominantly white society and he says that they have a responsibility to give a voice to these experiences: 'This has to do with speaking what is not spoken, with naming what is not named, with articulating a body of rejected knowledge; that is to say knowledge which is known to be true within the black world, but which is rejected by its white shadow.' He ends his speech with a reference to how difficult it is for the views of the ethnic minorities to be heard because of the prejudices of the national press in contemporary Britain and follows that point with: 'A country that refuses to listen to its most threatened, most disadvantaged, and most frightened citizens until they start running through the streets burning things, is a culture which creates the crisis which it then seems to deplore.'<sup>71</sup> One is almost obliged to accept that Rushdie did have some indication of what was to come following publication of *The Satanic Verses*, and in 1990 in his essay *In Good Faith* he answers the accusation of 'doing it on purpose':

*He did it on purpose* is one of the strangest accusations ever levelled at a writer. Of course I did it on purpose. The question is, and it is what I have tried to answer: what is the 'it' that I did? What I did not do was conspire against Islam; or write - after years and years of anti-racist work and writing - a text of incitement to racial hatred; or anything of the sort. My golem, my false Other, may be capable of such deeds, but I am not. Would I have written differently if I had known what would happen? Truthfully I don't know. Would I change any of the text now? I would not. It's too late. As Friedrich Durrenmatt wrote in *The Physicists*: 'What has once been thought cannot be unthought'.<sup>72</sup>

There is no doubt that the publication of this novel, and the Ayatollah's fatwa against the author, has seriously undermined community relations in Britain and has caused disquiet throughout the Islamic world. Even now, ten years after publication, despite the softening of the antagonism between the governments of Great Britain and Iran, not all other countries have followed suit. As late as 15 May 1998 *The Bookseller* reported that the St Petersburg-

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<sup>71</sup> Salman Rushdie, 'Minority Literatures in a Multi-Cultural Society', *Displaced Persons*, edited version by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford, Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1988. p42.

<sup>72</sup> Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', p410.

based publisher Limbus Press had to drop their plans to publish *The Satanic Verses* because of threats by Islamic fundamentalists. Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, the head of the Russian Mufti Council, said 'the book would provoke an "adequate response" if it appeared'. Perhaps this Council has similar feelings to those still felt by one hundred and fifty Iranian parliamentarians who have signed a petition declaring that the fatwa is a 'divine order' and 'the verdict against the blasphemer is death, today and tomorrow',<sup>73</sup> despite the announcement of the official British-Iranian accord in October 1998. But maybe the most chilling report was a small item in *The Times* on the 29 December 1999 where it said that 'more than 500 Iranian hard-liners in the city of Mashad have pledged to sell one of their kidneys to pay for the murder of the author Salman Rushdie', and after a few explanatory lines about the fatwa it ends with 'an appeal would be launched on the Internet for money to implement the fatwa'.

So far that appeal has not been launched but the Internet did provide a unique supply of information about *The Satanic Verses* and as the millennium approaches there are still 1,626 web sites that deal directly or indirectly with the book, from a complete critical analysis, chapter by chapter, by Professor Paul Brians of Washington State University, to quotes taken out of context in order to stir up racial hatred. So, twelve years after publication this book remains in the consciousness of many but there does not appear to be any research about whether or not the number of readers has increased, which suggests yet another form of censorship. Is the publishing world still too sensitive about the book for research funds to be allocated to it, or is it that there is no interest? One suspects that there are many copies of *The Satanic Verses* collecting dust on bookshelves as little more than a souvenir of a media event.

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<sup>73</sup> *The Times*, 5 October 1998.



At the end of 1999 a spokesman for Viking Penguin was prepared to say that over 1,000,000 hardback copies of *The Satanic Verses* had been sold worldwide including America but he laughed at the idea that they would have any archive material about the effect the publication of *The Satanic Verses* had on them as a company. He implied that 'having one's fingers burnt' is the last thing to which a company would admit - they just get on and publish the next book. The Penguin Archive at Bristol University which is so well supplied with information on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was also reticent on the subject of *The Satanic Verses*. Their spokesman said that there is a gap in their 1980s archive material and definitely nothing on the reaction to the novel. That may be so but if one equates Penguin's loss before interest of £2.2 million in the first half of 1989 (a swing of £3.4 million from the 1988 first half profits of £1.2 million)<sup>74</sup> with the losses sustained by the publication of Rushdie's novel, then the evidence can be found in the business section of the trade press. A 1989 article in which Trevor Glover, managing director of Penguin UK, is reported to have said: 'Trading conditions have been difficult in the UK so far this year and there have been grave difficulties on the hardback side', also refers to many reasons for the difficulties but there is no mention of *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>75</sup>

Testifying before a Senate hearing on the Rushdie affair (8 March 1989) the author Susan Sontag had said that she believed that the Rushdie affair would bring censorship to the American publishing community as a whole and self-censorship to authors. This can take place in 'the book that doesn't get written, or the book that is rejected by the publisher, or the book order that's not made by an individual or store or library - these things are hidden from the public view.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *The Bookseller*, 1 September 1989, p651.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Publishers Weekly*, 24 March 1989, p10.

It seems that Sontag was right. It is not only the American publishers who have been affected by censorship. For David Caute the damage to community relations was not the only side effect the publication of *The Satanic Verses* caused. It also caused publishers to be more circumspect about what they published, so much so that in 1998, ten years after *The Satanic Verses* first appeared, David Caute had his novel *Fatima's Scarf* turned down by over twenty publishers. He eventually had to publish it himself and by the end of February 1999, he had managed to sell three thousand hardback copies.<sup>77</sup> Despite the book being a fictionalised version of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, he did not expect so many rejections by publishers but it would appear that the outcry caused by *The Satanic Verses* was still fresh in their minds, if not their pockets.

Billed as 'the novel no British publisher would print', it is a satire on the improbable idea that the author of a novel could be condemned to death for offending Muslim fundamentalists. The synopsis on the jacket cover of *Fatima's Scarf* is plain and straight forward; there is no fantasy component as in *The Satanic Verses*, thus the hard-hitting race relations element in *Fatima's Scarf* is more forceful, and as such, more truthful than Rushdie's professed claim to be writing about 'a migrant's-eye view of the world'.<sup>78</sup>

From his earliest years, Gamal Rahman was a troublemaker. Born in Cairo, the son of a Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Gamal began life by killing his mother in childbirth. As a journalist and tutor to the amorous daughters of President Sharaf, he found his vocation: the literary murder of presidents and princesses. Hostile to Islamic fundamentalism, Gamal finally extended his hitman's contract to God - the ultimate literary commission.

By the time *The Devil: an Interview* is published, Gamal is living in exile in England. Publicly damned and burned by incensed Muslims in the Yorkshire city of Bruddersford, his book generates communal upheaval. Racial tensions erupt. The local Labour party becomes fiercely embroiled and long-standing alliances are shattered.

Nasreen Hassani, trapped between old values and the modern quest for personal fulfilment, can no longer sustain her marriage, children rebel against patriarchy, and Muslim girls, inspired by the fourteen-year-old Fatima, embark on a bitter strike to defend their right to wear the scarf of modesty in school. While the claims of women fuel the flames, young men embrace the sons of Allah, dedicated to the execution of the apostate author Gamal Rahman.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> David Caute, personal postcard, February 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', p394.

<sup>79</sup> David Caute, *Fatima's Scarf*, London: Totterdown Books, 1998.

In an afterword Cate states that *Fatima's Scarf* is a work of fiction but admits that it is based on the Rushdie affair, and in the acknowledgements (like Rushdie's at the end of the book) he lists *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*, and says that *Fatima's Scarf* is replete with implicit allusions to these three novels by Rushdie and to the public debates following publication of *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>80</sup> He also acknowledges many other texts he has drawn on for the historical background, the doctrines of Ayatollah Khomeini and works regarding the Muslim 'intifada' in Britain, for example, so his fiction, like Rushdie's, is very factual.

Thus the legacy of *The Satanic Verses* is a cautious publishing trade, especially as regards any book that might have to call on Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights to justify its publication. Yet Rushdie continues to write and continues to be published so his economic value to the trade has not been unduly diminished. As the 1980s rolled into the 1990s with anti-Rushdie feeling at its height, other non-white writers were capturing the imagination of the reading public with their books which managed to reflect the diverse cultural influences of the post-colonial society without causing commotion, other than that caused by V S Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, and Ben Okri winning prizes which were minor excitements in comparison. While Vikram Seth was quietly creating headlines with *A Suitable Boy*, the longest novel in English since *Clarissa*, more and more information about books and publishing gradually spread from the book sections and the business pages into the main body of the broadsheet newspapers.

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<sup>80</sup> Cate, p560.

## Chapter 7

### *The Horse Whisperer*

If the legacy of *The Satanic Verses* is a cautious publishing trade, then my fourth and final choice of book does nothing to upset it. The 1990s book publishing trade is all about making a profit and *The Horse Whisperer*, the first novel written by the script writer and film producer Nicholas Evans,<sup>1</sup> succeeds admirably. Unlike my three previous choices of books the details of *The Horse Whisperer* can be outlined with the minimum number of words which are inversely proportional to the number of noughts on the sales contracts.

*The Horse Whisperer* was predicted to be the number one international bestseller of the 1990s on the basis of 200 pages and a detailed synopsis nine months before it was published. It has lived up to its hype in terms of sales and it is a good example of a novel that has made minor celebrities of the agents who negotiated the million dollar deals associated with it. By focusing attention on the agents it has become possible to broaden the extent of the publicity hype not only for *The Horse Whisperer* but also for all the other lucrative deals that that specific agent has handled, thereby increasing the bargaining power of that agent. Thus the agent's contribution to the success of a particular novel, in the past relegated to the background, has now become an acknowledged part of the outcome.

In all the newspaper and magazine articles relating to *The Horse Whisperer* various terms associated with vast sums of money were given prominence in the headlines or sub-titles with the story itself getting relatively scant notice. The first report about this book appeared in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 11 October 1994 followed by a *Daily Mail* 'exclusive' on the 26 October, and *The Guardian* on the 29 October but it was not until the 18 November in the

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<sup>1</sup>His screen credits include *Just Like a Woman*, and *Murder by the Book* which won the 1991 ACE Award for Best International Film; and a 1985 documentary on Laurence Olivier that won both an Emmy Award and a British Academy Award.

US and the 19th in the UK that the story became conspicuous with articles in the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Post*, *Washington Post* and *Daily Variety* in the US and in *The Times*, *Evening Standard*, *The Independent*, *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* in the UK. All these newspaper articles were in the main body of the paper, often on the front pages.

Anita M Busch, writing in the January 1995 edition of the American film magazine *Premiere*, gave her version of events chronicled under the headline: 'Feeding Frenzy', in which she featured the role of the agents, and it was her remark: '...the story was practically irrelevant' that conceivably summarised this particular 1990s deal, yet there had to be a story to galvanise the agent into action and it had to be an out of the ordinary one to justify the enormous price paid for it, or so it would be assumed. But John Sutherland sums up the irrelevancy of a bestseller story when he says:

...the utility of bestsellers lies in the very fact that they often have no literary merit to distract us. We are not therefore detained by any respect for their sanctity as 'texts'. Nor are we automatically led to think of them as finished products in their own right; instead we can view them as integrated and dependent parts of a frankly commercial machinery, itself the product of a particular society at a particular period of history. Seen in this way, the bestselling novel may be reckoned as subordinate to other parts of the manufacturing and consuming system - such as the publicity which helps sell it, the author's 'image' or the public's 'needs'.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore Sutherland would recognise that the highlighting of the costs involved is not new, but what is new in the case of *The Horse Whisperer* is the publicity surrounding the individual agents and their parts in the deal. In the past, first novels have been sold to publishers, overseas rights have followed at a later stage and then possibly film rights options have been discussed once the popularity of the particular book has been established. However, with the *The Horse Whisperer*, the sale of the book, the worldwide publishing rights and the film deal were all negotiated at the same time over the course of two weeks, with the agents involved receiving their own press coverage. It was the A P Wyatt agency

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<sup>2</sup> John Sutherland, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. p4/5.

which was responsible, through Caradoc King, Nick Marston and Linda Shaughnessy for bringing *The Horse Whisperer* to the world's attention. King dealt with Evans initially and steered him through the book deals, Shaughnessy organised the foreign rights auctions, and Marston, with the Hollywood agency CAA acting as co-agent, masterminded the advantageous film deal and, as a result, he was interviewed by *The Independent on Sunday* under the heading 'Robert Redford and the Bloomsbury Kid'.<sup>3</sup>

According to Evans<sup>4</sup> Nicolette Jones writing in *The Bookseller*,<sup>5</sup> gave the most factually correct account of the selling of *The Horse Whisperer*<sup>6</sup> where she traced the different parts each agent played. King, a long-standing friend of Evans', had been shown the first 200 pages with an outline of the rest in September 1994. Three weeks later Evans had made the few changes King had suggested and the partial manuscript was ready to be shown to prospective publishers, most of whom, fortuitously, were about to congregate at the Frankfurt International Book Fair. Evans has said that it was just by chance that it was ready in time for the world's biggest Book Fair but in a congregation of thousands of publishers, agents and booksellers there can be little doubt that a 'whisper' about a new novel in such circumstances can spread much more easily.

'Publishing starts with the passion of one person'<sup>7</sup> and in the case of *The Horse Whisperer* it was Ursula Mackenzie of Transworld, who had previously been told the plot of the book by King at a party. She was very excited and impressed with the manuscript and wanted to secure the floor<sup>8</sup> for her company. Transworld offered £50,000 but after hearing that

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<sup>3</sup> *The Independent on Sunday*, 12 March 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Personal interview, 25 April 1995.

<sup>5</sup> *The Bookseller*, 9 December 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Which is to be expected since *The Bookseller* is 'the organ of the book trade'.

<sup>7</sup> Kate Figs, *The Independent on Sunday*, 12 November 1995.

<sup>8</sup> A 'floor' means a bid for a book, a guaranteed offer, and if no other bid is made the bidder is obliged to buy it at the bid price.

Heinemann had made a pre-emptive offer of £100,000 they raised their bid to £120,000 which was accepted by King after a discussion with Evans. In informing Transworld of the higher bid and thereby offering them the chance of raising theirs, since they had shown interest first, King was not being entirely altruistic. He wanted Transworld to show the book to their American colleagues, among them Carole Baron of Dell (Bantam Doubleday Dell), to create interest among American publishers. This strategy worked well and Baron put down an acceptable floor of \$250,000, somewhat higher than her original bid of \$75,000. For Baron, and Ursula Mackenzie, it was considered a personal coup to have secured the book for their respective companies.

By this time, the film industry was showing an interest so King brought in his colleague Nick Marston to deal with Hollywood who linked up with the Hollywood agency CAA to co-agent the film sale. Any offer under \$1,000,000 was discarded and the agents told the studios that for \$3,000,000 they could talk to the author, and it was Evans who made the decision to make an outright deal (ie not an option) in favour of Robert Redford's company Wildwood Productions, part of the Disney owned Hollywood Pictures because he felt that Redford would deal sympathetically with the subject. Busch, in her account of the film rights negotiations, points out that several producers, so keen to get the rights, were, without realising it, bidding against each other and thereby increasing the price. For example, Scot Rudin, Sidney Pollack and Frank Marshall with Kathleen Kennedy made separate bids yet they were all based at Paramount. Redford offered Evans the chance to write the screenplay of his novel but he turned it down because past experience had taught him that the writer of the source material is not necessarily the best person to do it. Having adapted other people's novels he knew that decisions made by screenplay writers about what should stay and what should go were difficult and he felt that he was too close to the subject to be able to make those choices.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> From the information supplied by Carole Baron, President and publisher, Dell (Bantam

While the film negotiations were under discussion the auction for the UK rights was taking place and Transworld finally secured the book for £357,000. Meanwhile Linda Shaughnessy had been organising the foreign rights auctions; approximately £350,000 each secured the German, French and Italian rights and undisclosed amounts were paid for rights in a further fourteen other languages. In the North American auction, which was handled by King and A P Wyatt's American co-agent Ellen Levine, Dell exercised topping rights<sup>10</sup> to buy the book for \$3,150,000 which was the highest amount ever paid for North American publishing rights for a first novel. Suggestions made by the *New York Post*<sup>11</sup> that 'the movie deal played a major role in boosting the book rights' and 'the first thing anyone said about the book is that Redford bought the movie rights' were not repeated in the UK press, but the suggestion is likely to have been valid.

Transworld is the UK company name which includes a variety of imprints of which Bantam Press hardcover and Corgi paperback acquired *The Horse Whisperer*. Transworld is a wholly owned subsidiary of Bantam Doubleday Dell in the US which is likewise owned by Bertlesmann, a German company. What rights a company obtains depends on what the author's agent wishes to sell them and in the case of this book King decided to sell it separately in as many territories as possible. Thus, each of these three companies, despite common ownership, had to bid independently for the right to publish this book, thereby maximising the income for the author and the agent.

Nicholas Evans was having dinner with friends in Devon when the subject of horse whisperers was first raised and as the idea for the story took hold he researched into them in

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Doubleday Dell).

<sup>10</sup> At the end of an auction the floor has 'topping rights' which means the floor can top the highest bid and buy the book.

<sup>11</sup> *New York Post*, 18 November 1994.



England and America. A local blacksmith told him about a gypsy whisperer he had seen calm a horse that had been so dangerous no one could go near it. He found that horse whispering was cloaked in all kinds of folklore as well as magic and witchcraft which he thought may have been created to protect what was actually a very valuable asset. With the agricultural community dependent on horses, anyone with whispering ability would be held in esteem and be in demand - but he did find cases of fraud and people who used cruel tricks to appear to calm horses. In America he found three horse whisperers, although they did not call themselves 'whisperers', one of whom runs clinics similar to the ones his fictional character, Tom Booker, conducts. He watched all three of them work so that every step his character takes with the out-of-control horse Pilgrim, he has witnessed and hopefully understood.<sup>12</sup> He decided to base his story in the American state of Montana because of the wide open spaces and the lack of class problems so prevalent in British society. If based in Britain the association of the seemingly upper class horse owning characters with the horse whisperer, with what would be his gypsy-cum-traveller working class image, would immediately label the book in a way Evans did not want. Also, by locating the story in America he hoped to appeal to a much wider audience, which he reinforced by using American spelling in the typescript.<sup>13</sup>

*The Horse Whisperer* is a tragic love story variously described in the British press as 'The most heart breaking, soul enriching novel of the year' (*The Daily Telegraph*); 'A remarkable, profoundly moving work' (*The Daily Mail*); 'Breathtaking in its depth and beauty' (*Guardian*); 'A rare thing indeed a highly readable novel that at the same time pulses with serious emotional intent' (*Independent*); and 'I defy even the most hardened cynic to come away from this book without a tear in his eye' (*The Times*). It is a story, written by a man but from the viewpoint of a woman, that explores important themes; the mother/daughter

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<sup>12</sup> From the information supplied by Carole Baron.

<sup>13</sup> Personal interview, 25 April 1995.

relationship, marriage, conflict between career and the demands of the family and personal attachments. (This is probably why Evans was nominated for the 1996 Romantic Novelist of the Year Award.<sup>14</sup>) Ursula Mackenzie described it as 'life affirming' by which she meant 'that it is a positive book showing that love and human hope can overcome pain and grief'.<sup>15</sup>

*The Horse Whisperer* opens as a forty ton truck hurtles out of control on a snowy country road, a teenage girl on horseback in its path. In a few terrible seconds, the life of a family is shattered. And a mother's quest begins to save her maimed daughter and a horse driven mad by pain. It is an odyssey that will bring her to Tom Booker, the inheritor of the legendary gifts of 'the whisperers', men whose voices can gentle wild horses, whose touch can heal broken spirits.

Annie Graves has travelled across a continent with her daughter, Grace, and their wounded horse, Pilgrim, to the Booker ranch in Montana. She has risked everything, her career, her marriage, her comfortable life, in her desperate belief that the Whisperer can help them. The accident has turned Pilgrim savage. He is now so demented and dangerous that everyone says he should be destroyed. But Annie won't give up on him. For she feels that his fate is inextricably entwined with that of her daughter, who has retreated into a heartrending, hostile silence. Annie knows that if the horse dies, something in Grace will die too. And now Tom Booker is to meet his greatest challenge.

In the weeks to come, under the massive sky of Rocky Mountain Front, all their lives, including Tom Booker's, will be transformed forever in a way none could have foretold.<sup>16</sup>

That outline of *The Horse Whisperer* was issued by Delacorte Press as part of their marketing campaign. With its dramatic adjectives it echoes the breathless enthusiasm for the book shown by its American publishers. However, the more restrained version on the dust wrapper of the British book is a better example because it more clearly emulates Evans' style of writing and shows an intuitiveness and knowledge of the text that is lacking in the American one:

In the still of a snow covered morning in upstate New York, a girl out riding her horse is hit by a 40 ton truck. Though horribly injured, both thirteen year old Grace Maclean and her horse Pilgrim survive. But the impact on their lives and the lives of those who love them is devastating.

Grace is the only child of a prominent New York magazine editor, Annie Graves, and her lawyer husband Robert. In a way which none of them at first understands, their destiny comes to depend on Pilgrim's. So mutilated and traumatized is he that even the vet who saved his life now wishes he hadn't. Annie refuses to have him destroyed, sensing that if she does, something in Grace will die too.

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<sup>14</sup> This award has not yet been won by a man. The 1996 award was won by *Coming Home* by Rosamunde Pilcher.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview, 9 March 1995.

<sup>16</sup> From the information supplied by Carole Baron, most of which appears on the dust jacket blurb of the US edition of the book.

She hears about a man in Montana, a 'whisperer' who is said to have the gift of healing troubled horses. Abandoning her job, Annie sets off across the continent like some latter day pioneer, with Grace and Pilgrim, to find him. The man's name is Tom Booker and he lives on the Rocky Mountain Front, a place of daunting beauty, where the high plains run smack into a hundred million year old wall of limestone. Here, under the massive Montana sky, all their lives are changed forever. <sup>17</sup>

The UK and US publishers both used the same marketing slogan 'Believe', which meant that they wanted the book buying public 'to believe in the quality of the book; that it is as good as it is claimed to be'.<sup>18</sup> Carole Baron, the President of Bantam Doubleday Dell, and publisher of *The Horse Whisperer* in America, thought that it was 'interesting to note that the English....have chosen to use the American campaign of "Believe"' and when asked if she thought the book was something out of the ordinary she replied: 'Yes, yes, yes. This is not a trend nor is this under the heading of: "Big Money Paid for First Novel." Nick's book is special, and everyone who reads it somehow is captured by its power.'<sup>19</sup>

All the expensive pre-publication publicity is worthless, however, if readers pay no attention to it and the book does not sell. One way to make a new book stand out initially from the other 34,000 general books published in any one year is for it to have an interesting title and an eye-catching cover, and in this instance it was not only the accompanying blurb that made a distinction between the British and American editions, the design and art work on the book covers also indicated a different approach.

The Americans have made use of a computer and tinting to adjust their photographs of a horse and a mountain range leaving the impression that neither is quite real and, akin to their extravagant descriptive prose, they have used embossed gold lettering for the title and author's name which is set at the top and bottom of the cover. In contrast the British cover

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<sup>17</sup> Dust jacket blurb from UK Bantam Press edition.

<sup>18</sup> Definition given by Ursula Mackenzie of Transworld.

<sup>19</sup> Personal letter sent by Carole Baron, 15 August 1995, which accompanied a free copy of the book plus a folder of information relating to the book, Nicholas Evans, and the marketing campaign.

has two magenta tinted black and white photographs of Montana mountains and a section of a horse's head featuring the right eye separated by the title and author's name printwork. The British cover, like the accompanying blurb, also illustrates a more in-depth knowledge of the book: 'His [Pilgrim] body was pointing away but he had turned his head and was looking right at the camera',<sup>20</sup> and, towards the end of the book: 'He [Pilgrim] lay there a moment, looking up at them with one eye, not moving his head.'<sup>21</sup> Both quotes come from focal points in the narrative, but it is debateable whether or not it is really necessary to be familiar with the content to market the book successfully. For example, the *Washington Post* and *LA Times* both list best selling fiction and on 15 October 1995 one described the plot of *The Horse Whisperer* as: 'A mother tries to save her daughter by healing a horse injured in an accident', and the other said: 'A beautiful journalist escapes type A New York and a dubious marriage to find love on the range in Montana.' In Britain the plot is originally described in *The Times* bestseller list as: 'Rugged man soothes traumatised horse and high powered owner', but by the time the film tie-in paperback version reached the bestseller list it was reduced to: 'Healing horses and humans'.

Although *The Horse Whisperer* was a best seller in Britain and in America because of the massive publicity campaigns involving television, radio, press, magazines, author tours, cross track advertisements throughout the London Underground network, for example, it was often linked to other best selling books, particularly *The Bridges of Madison County* by James Waller, as if this comparison would convince a wavering reader to read it. Ian Katz, writing in *The Guardian*, recorded the complaints of those exasperated by the comparisons and then proceeded to complete his article with a 'compare and contrast' piece exactly in line with that of which he complained:

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<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Evans, *The Horse Whisperer*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1995. p56.

<sup>21</sup> Evans, p374.

*Bridges* was about a rugged photographer who sweeps into a small country town and has an intense but impossible affair with a beautiful middle aged mother. *Whisperer* is about a rugged horse tamer who sweeps into a small country town and has an intense affair with a middle aged mother.<sup>22</sup>

most popular book being the one which most effectively helps people to identify imaginatively

*The Horse Whisperer* was in turn used in just such a manner to publicise a new book. The paperback edition of *The Lazarus Child* by Robert Mawson was advertised as 'the new *Horse Whisperer* of the year' in April 1999. *Whisperer* is power in through the best-seller rankings

because of the author's involvement in the practical relationship with animals and career

New books have approximately six weeks after publication to establish themselves no matter how much money has been invested in publicity. In the case of *The Horse Whisperer* it managed to stay in *The Sunday Times* best selling hardback fiction list for six months following publication and by the middle of 1996 it had been on the bestseller lists of the thirty-two countries in which it had been published. By the end of 1996 it was the bestselling paperback with 400,000 copies sold, and by the end of 1998 the film tie-in was still selling approximately 1,500 copies a week which has contributed to the overall sales of over 12,000,000 copies worldwide to date. The novel's particular popularity was noted by a Midlands bookshop owner who said:

When the news broke about the film rights and the vast sums being paid for *The Horse Whisperer* people came into the shop and asked me to reserve copies. On previous occasions when people have ordered books, following media publicity prior to publication, they have forgotten all about it by the time it reached the shop and then did not want it but with *The Horse Whisperer* people are buying it. I thought that it was the title that intrigued them, helped by the striking cover.<sup>23</sup>

John G Cawelti questions whether 'some works of literature become popular primarily because they contain a good story artistically told or because they embody values and attitudes that their audience wishes to see affirmed?'<sup>24</sup> Both those points could be used as an argument for the popularity of *The Horse Whisperer*, and when Cawelti goes on to further

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<sup>22</sup> *The Guardian*, 19 November 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Personal telephone conversation, June 1996, with Kevin Quinn, of Quinn's Bookshop, Market Harborough, Leicestershire.

<sup>24</sup> John G Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. p22.

question whether or not popularity implies 'psychological wish-fulfillment' because 'the most popular works being those which most effectively help people to identify imaginatively with actions they would like to perform but cannot in the ordinary course of events'<sup>25</sup> the argument might be accepted as valid. Rival literary agents conceded that they expected the old fashioned themes of *The Horse Whisperer* to power it through the bestseller rankings because, said Anthony Harwood, 'it has mystical relationships with animals and career women getting back to their home life'.<sup>26</sup> Evans himself said it was about 'the power of human beings to come through even the most terrible pain and reconnect with themselves and the world', and he thought that it was that healing message that appealed to the readers.<sup>27</sup> Although both these statements correctly sum up the themes of the novel, Harwood, I suspect, has articulated its real appeal and answers Cawelti's questions. In a 1990s world where women are expected to prove the compatibility of motherhood and career, a novel that portrays a woman's escape from the binds of office life, despite the traumatic events that preceded it, must have found favour in the minds of many working women readers fed up with juggling priorities. Evans' depiction of the hypocritical boss who told the character Annie to take all the time that she needed away from the office while secretly planning to replace her would be recognised by many working mothers with sick children.

However, not everyone was enthusiastic. *Publishers Weekly*, in a review on the Internet, thought that the book was a mild anticlimax after all the fuss about the multi-million dollar book and film deals but agreed that with its themes of 'worldly success versus the simple life, the redeeming power of love, the mystique of animals - all set against a wide-screen background of Montana' it would undoubtedly be a bestseller.<sup>28</sup> Others unhappy with the

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Harwood of Curtis Brown, *The Guardian*, 19 November 1995.

<sup>27</sup> From the information supplied by Carole Baron.

<sup>28</sup> *Publishers Weekly*, 12 June 1995.

themes gave vent to their feelings on the Internet site dedicated to *The Horse Whisperer*, but the dissatisfied here were not generally very articulate as to why they disliked the novel.

While the book was establishing a large readership, the film was being made and snippets of gossip about the process were published in various newspapers thereby keeping the title in the forefront of readers attention.<sup>29</sup> The film was released in the UK in September 1998 and despite competition from such films as *Armageddon* and *The X-Files*, for example, it featured in the Top 10 UK films for five weeks. As with so many films it tells a different story to that of Nicholas Evans' and anyone persuaded to read the book after seeing the film (which is a very long one with acres of Montana to be admired) the love story between the two main characters and the ending will surprise them.

The subject of people who can 'whisper' to horses is not new. It is mentioned in *Lark Rise to Candleford* for example,<sup>30</sup> and following the publicity associated with Evans' novel, the men with the ability to deal with out-of-control horses, were featured in the press and on television, in particular Monty Roberts. The BBC2 programme QED produced a show about him and his techniques in August 1995 and it was repeated in July 1997 either side of the publication of his 1996 book *The Man Who Listens to Horses*. *The News of the World*, 11 May 1997, also took advantage of the public interest in the forthcoming film of *The Horse Whisperer* and published a double page spread on the 'Horse and cart hero behind Hollywood blockbuster', a character called 'Gypsy Jules', suggesting that he is the man on whom Evans modelled his 'horse whisperer'.

Another who took advantage of the widespread publicity surrounding *The Horse Whisperer* was the communications company Cable and Wireless, who, in conjunction with the film

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<sup>29</sup> For example, it was reported in *The Times* that William and Ffion Hague decided to holiday in Montana after seeing the film, 12 December 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Part of a trilogy by Flora Thompson. First published in 1945.

company Buena Vista International, saw the film as an opportunity to promote Internet usage to women and distributed 500,000 free *Horse Whisperer*-themed tutorial discs. *The Horse Whisperer* was seen as the perfect medium to convey the message because the main female character, Annie Graves, played by Kristin Scott Thomas, used the Internet to find the man she believed could cure her daughter's horse. Using the premiere of the film as a backdrop Cable and Wireless released the findings of a nation-wide survey of women's use of the Internet, which showed that half the women in the survey who used a computer did not use the Internet or email services 'because it was too expensive, too complicated and had nothing to offer women.'<sup>31</sup> This finding appears to say more about the women who completed the survey than about the vagaries of the Internet.

As an example to show how *The Horse Whisperer* has really become established in the national consciousness was one of the questions asked in the BBC2 programme *University Challenge*, with Magdalen College, Oxford, as the University Challenge team, versus the Mastermind Final finalists. The question was: 'Who was Tom Booker?'<sup>32</sup> Following the hard work of all the related publicity departments it would have been a disaster for them if the teams had not known the answer.

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<sup>31</sup> *The Times*, Interface supplement, 2 September 1998.

<sup>32</sup> BBC2 television programme, 23 December 1997.



## CONCLUSION

In the 1960s Robert Escarpit asked himself the question: 'What is a book?' at the beginning of his review of the publishing trade up to the mid-1960s, and one of his answers was: 'A book...cannot be treated like an ordinary commercial commodity, because it is, at once, multiple and unique, in ample supply yet precious'.<sup>1</sup> After assessing many aspects of the trade he concludes rather pessimistically that once the book's function as a means of limitless communication between people is lost 'however fine its appearance and however noble its content, it is merely so much waste-paper, a soul-less treasure. One might as well put a stone in its place.'<sup>2</sup> Having looked thoroughly at *The Horse Whisperer* as an example of the 1990s popular fiction publishing trade and how it has been marketed I think Escarpit would recognise, with despair, where the trade's priority now lies. Putting a new interpretation on Escarpit's words, books, in general, have become like stones, plentiful but indistinguishable from each other. As Anita Busch said, with reference to *The Horse Whisperer*, 'the story [is] practically irrelevant'.<sup>3</sup> It is the number of noughts added to the contract figures and seeing that figure reflected in the number of copies sold that is the most important factor because big numbers mean big profits for the publisher which in turn means that that publisher will survive the next round of take-overs. It is the work of the marketing, sales and publicity departments at the publishing houses to implement that factor. They are now the key people as regards any company's profitability and it is a wise author who checks the marketing plans in his contract before signing any deal no matter how many noughts are attached to the contract figure.

However, despite this avid emphasis on profitability, the future for popular fiction publishing is bright. The collapse of the NBA had been seen by many as a threat to the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Escarpit, *The Book Revolution*, London: Harrap and UNESCO, 1966. p17.

<sup>2</sup> Escarpit, p160.

<sup>3</sup> Anita M Busch, *Premiere*, January 1995.

viability of trade but with its greater emphasis on blockbuster titles with secure sales like *The Horse Whisperer* it will survive, but with fewer titles being sold. This means that new authors will find it increasingly difficult to get published yet the urge to write is very strong regardless of whether or not it results in a publishing contract, and the writing of fiction is now considered to be something anyone can do. The proliferation of 'How to write a best seller' books, or variations on that theme, invites all those who believe that they have a book in them to have a go and thousands do. In 1998 more than three billion pounds worth of books were sold in Britain compared with just over two billion in 1990. Since 1997 more than 100,000 books a year are being produced, more than double the number at the start of the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> This enormous number of books must have been written by almost a similar number of authors but it does not necessarily mean that they will earn enough to recoup the value of the hours put into the project or the cost of the fees of the 'How to' courses. In Chapters 2 and 3 the subject of author poverty was addressed but no effective solutions were offered. In the future an enlightened Government culture department might provide an allowance while writing is in progress or perhaps patronage could be reintroduced but this could lead to some sort of control as to what is written.<sup>5</sup>

The liberality of books, especially those with a sexual content, is thought to date from the Lady Chatterley trial. By the 1990s it is deviant sex which is written about more openly and graphically in mainstream fiction and it is still the norm for books, that arouse disgust in some readers of the pre-production copies, to get publicity. One such book was *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis in 1991. Initially refused by a publisher because of its content the resultant publicity (no doubt, carefully orchestrated), provoked enough interest for

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<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Dick Francis has found that his novels are subject to a limited form of censorship by publishers in the US. He had to remove the words 'walks like a lesbian' from the American edition of *Decider* (1993) and although *Readers Digest* generally buy all his books they would not take *Decider* because incest is mentioned. (Personal interview with Felix Francis, on behalf of his father Dick Francis. 16 February 1995.)

another publisher to see the commercial advantages of publishing a book that is filled with descriptions of severed female parts, violent sex, rampant greed and self-gratification yet marketed as 'a brilliant metaphor for the self-consuming plunder of Wall Street's Eighties boom'.<sup>6</sup> Enough readers have accepted that as a valid reason for reading it to place it at No. 77 on the Top 100 Waterstone's Books of the Century.<sup>7</sup> Whether the publishing of this sort of book can be attributed to the freedom gained by the outcome of the Lady Chatterley trial is debateable but as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression ... and [to] impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers', and sex, so they found in 1960, continues to sell books.

Chapter 6 was opened with Article 19 as justification for publishing *The Satanic Verses* but it is questionable whether that was a valid reason for the publication of a novel that caused so much hurt to the Muslim community, in Britain in particular. André Brink said that literature had a dissenting function in society and could also function as a Molotov cocktail.<sup>8</sup> The debate about whether or not Salman Rushdie was justified in lobbing his Molotov cocktail into the publishing world lingers on, but no matter how one feels about the publication of *The Satanic Verses* it did reflect the state of society in the 1980s and it is therefore important. The politicians may feel that they have resolved the situation by re-opening the trade barriers with Iran but there are still many individuals who remain feeling betrayed. Despite the Government's pledge when they were in opposition to review the laws of blasphemy, twelve years after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* still nothing has been done and publishers, presumably, shy away from publishing novels that may damage their profits.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 27 March 1997.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix II. (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is No.81 and *The Horse Whisperer* No.100.)

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty Lecture, Oxford. 9 February 1995.

Individual authors like David Caute, who was victimised by this insidious form of corporate and commercial censorship, solved the problem by setting up his own publishing company. With the advent of desk-top publishing it is not only the big companies with small numbers of specialist books to produce who benefit from this new technology. Self-publishing has become a feasible alternative to an unattractive contract offered by a traditional publisher. With unlimited opportunities for self-publicity and hype through the media and book festivals for example, there is every chance that a self-published book will provide as lucrative a result as one hyped by a publisher's publicity team especially if the book is written by an established author. A new author, however, might not find it so easy.

Market pressures continue to dictate what is published and authors have to accept that manuscripts that are rejected are not necessarily bad, they are merely considered uncommercial or not even read, or just lost in the 'slushpile'.<sup>9</sup> For a first time novelist it does appear to increase his or her chances of being considered commercial if they are already established in another field, such as politics, television gardening, journalism, cat-walk modelling, etc. (or being a script writer and film producer like Nicholas Evans.) If they are not already represented by an agent through their position, many of them will have contacts, or friends with contacts, who will know which publisher to approach to gain the most advantageous deal. Because these new authors are known to the general public the marketing, sales and publicity departments of their respective publishers have an easier job selling them to readers. Look at any listing of best selling popular fiction in the late 1990s and there is bound to be at least one author's name that can be associated with another discipline.

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<sup>9</sup> This is the name generally given to the pile on the editor's desk of unsolicited typescripts submitted directly by authors.

The coverage given to books in newspapers is also changing. Newspapers are becoming booksellers and several of them sell as many books as medium-sized high street book shops. Brian MacArthur writing in *The Times* suggested as many as 15,000 books a month were sold by *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* by the end of 1999 and probably the same number by *The Daily Telegraph*. He estimated that £15,000,000 a year was spent by national newspapers on buying books to serialise thereby increasing sales for the books and the newspapers.<sup>10</sup> They capitalise on their symbiotic relationship further with the publishers' publicity departments selling features about their authors to the features editors of the newspapers. It is this type of rapport that is helping to keep fiction popular and the names of a select few authors, usually well established, in the forefront of the public consciousness.

Supermarkets too are taking an increasing share of book sales, but because their choice of books is generally limited to those in the bestseller lists and their customers for books are more likely to be impulse shoppers, it is the book/stationery chains who will lose out rather than the specialist book shops. Yet all bookshops, regardless of location, are now threatened with competition from the Internet. In their efforts to combat this opposition many bookshops have their own websites, to cater for the increasing number of customers that are on-line. This increase is expected to continue as the television and telephone cable companies develop access to the Internet without a computer which means that not only will more people be buying books via Internet book sites but it will also encourage a greater interest in other on-line publishing activities. As an added benefit of this type of electronic access there might be an improvement in the general reading ability of the adults who find it difficult to read the likes of a bus timetable.

In Chapter 1 I observed that 'pre-1990s academic books on the subject of publishing are gloomy about the trade's chances of surviving the electronic age', but those text books will

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<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 14 October 1999.

have to be rewritten because it is the gadgets of the electronic age that have created some of the greatest number of changes in the publishing trade in the last forty years. The publishing trade has survived into the electronic age very successfully, although Penguin Books may have cause to regret it because it was the development of the instant worldwide communication systems that made the difference between a relatively insular bestseller of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and a global opprobrium-heaped bestseller of *The Satanic Verses* twenty-eight years later. These same systems helped break down the Traditional Market Agreement which resulted in worldwide exposure for *The Thorn Birds* and eighteen years later made it unnecessary for those auctioning *The Horse Whisperer* around the world to leave their individual offices. The electronic age has revolutionised book publishing and marketing and will continue to do so into the new millennium as all sections of the trade have seen the necessity to adapt or change their business methods to accommodate it.

Many of the big retail business bookshops recognise the importance of electronics in their efforts to compete for customers, and opening an in-house coffee shop with Internet facilities appears to be the favourite way generally of doing it. Waterstone's Piccadilly store with its six miles of shelves to attract the serious book buyer also offers a children's room, Internet station, café, bar and restaurant for those who are not so serious about book buying. The Borders chain has megastores in Leeds, Glasgow, Brighton and London that offer coffee, celebrities and live music as incentives. However, while these innovations are good for those customers who already have the book-buying habit, school children are being encouraged to collect tokens from newspapers and potato crisp packets in order to stock their school libraries, and municipal libraries are limiting their opening hours or facing closure.

Not all innovative ideas are successful. Faber and Faber introduced a unique promotion in order to boost flagging sales in 1993 when they offered cash incentives to customers rather than persuading them into book shops with price reductions or author signing sessions. They

had hoped to attract the quarter of the British population that does not buy books by a £1,000,000 literary lottery. The idea was that a customer who bought a title from a back-list selection and completed a tie-breaker would be given the chance to pick a volume from a promotional Book Tower. Hidden inside ninety-nine of the 100 books were cheques for £10,000. Inside the remaining book was a cheque for £1,000,000.<sup>11</sup> A lucky customer did win £10,000, not the million, and an extra £500,000 worth of books were sold. Thus, as a public relations exercise it was very successful but the underwriting cost of the promotion was more than the prize so that jackpot game was the first and the last.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the potato crisp packet token collection is the future.

With all the changes in the last forty years, particularly in the last ten, what ever is written about fiction and publishing now, including this thesis, will be out-of-date by the time it is published. This means that every development outlined herein has made some aspect of the popular fiction and publishing trade redundant and consigned it to history. Yet, despite a flourishing trade, authorial poverty remains as an unsolved problem, but only for the authors themselves. The popular fiction publishing trade is not concerned; the more authors there are prepared to spend their unpaid time producing typescripts the more chance there is that the trade will find the raw material for the next bestseller.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 11 February 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Will Atkinson of Faber and Faber, personal telephone conversation, 1 November 1999.

## APPENDIX I

### *Publishers Weekly* ALL-TIME FIRST FICTION BESTSELLERS 1945-1991 (based on hardback sales only)

1. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach.  
Macmillan, 1970. 1,400,000 copies sold.
2. *Lake Wobegon Days* by Garrison Keillor.  
Viking, 1985. 1,386,000.
3. *The Bonfire of the Vanities* by Tom Wolfe.  
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987. 745,321.
4. *Presumed Innocent* by Scott Turow.  
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987. 712,490.
5. *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough.  
Harper & Row, 1977. 675,513
6. *Contact* by Carl Sagan.  
Simon & Schuster, 1985. 475,000.
7. *Hunt for Red October* by Tom Clancy.  
Naval Institute Press, 1985. 438,159.
8. *Love Story* by Erich Segal.  
Harper and Row, 1970. 432,532.
9. *The Miracle of the Bells* by Russell Janney.  
Prentice-Hall, 1946. 400,000.
10. *Valley of the Dolls* by Jacqueline Susann.  
Bernard Geis, 1966. 360,000.
11. *Prime Time* by Joan Collins.  
Simon & Schuster, 1988. 327,000.
12. *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco.  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. 305,749.
13. *Watership Down* by Richard Adams.  
Macmillan, 1974. 305,000.
14. *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan.  
Putnam, 1989. 277,365.
15. *Peyton Place* by Grace Metalious.  
Messner, 1956. 250,000.
16. *From Here to Eternity* by James Jones.  
Scribners, 1951. 240,000.
17. *The Clan of the Cave Bear* by Jean M. Auel.  
Crown, 1980. 230,000.
18. *Two from Galilee* by Marjorie Holmes.  
Revell, 1972. 225,000.
19. *Up the Down Staircase* by Bel Kaufman.  
Prentice-Hall, 1965. 223,000.
20. *Jaws* by Peter Benchley.  
Doubleday, 1974. 222,000.

*Publishers Weekly*, November 8, 1991. (Reproduced with their permission.)



## APPENDIX II

### The Top 100 Waterstone's Books of the Century

1. *The Lord of the Rings*, J R R Tolkien. (1954)
2. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell. (1949)
3. *Animal Farm*, George Orwell. (1945)
4. *Ulysses*, James Joyce. (1922)
5. *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller. (1961)
6. *The Catcher in the Rye*, J D Salinger. (1951)
7. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee. (1960)
8. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. (1967, trans.1970)
9. *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck. (1939)
10. *Trainspotting*, Irvine Walsh. (1993)
11. *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang. (1993)
12. *The Great Gatsby*, F Scott Fitzgerald. (1925)
13. *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding. (1954)
14. *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac. (1957)
15. *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley. (1932)
16. *The Wind in the Willows*, Kenneth Grahame. (1908)
17. *Winnie-The-Pooh*, A A Milne. (1926)
18. *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker. (1983)
19. *The Hobbit*, J R R Tolkien. (1937)
20. *The Outsider*, Albert Camus. (1942)
21. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C S Lewis. (1950)
22. *The Trial*, Franz Kafka. (1925, trans. 1955, 1977)
23. *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell. (1936)
24. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams. (1979)
25. *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie. (1981)
26. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne Frank. (1947, trans.1952)
27. *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess. (1962)
28. *Sons and Lovers*, D H Lawrence. (1913)
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